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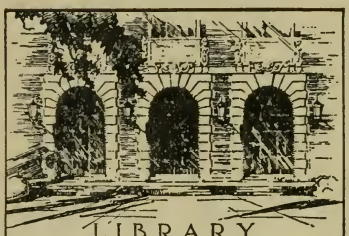

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BEYMINSTRE.

M'CORQUODALE AND CO., PRINTERS, LONDON.
WORKS—NEWTON.

E-Wallace, Ellen

BEYMINSTRE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LENA," "KING'S COPE," "MR. WARENNE,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
1856.

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BEYMINSTRE.

CHAPTER I.

ENGLAND is not, even yet, the land of music; and, twelve or fifteen years ago, it was still less harmoniously inclined than at present. It is not likely that our streets will ever resound with Mozart's choruses, nor will guitars thrill nightly beneath our windows: our damp roads forbid such romantic lingering, and our fogs threaten the open mouths so essential to vocal display. And yet, as genius is of no time and no country, as Scotland has produced its Wilkie, and Norway the world-honoured chisel of Thorwaldsen; so you meet sometimes, even in England, with an intense veneration for art, and a devotion to its highest

principles, that could never be surpassed in the sunniest land of song.

Mr. Winter, the organist of Great St. Benedict's, in the quiet country town of Bradford, is the best illustration I have ever known of these remarks. He is an enthusiast, a devoted and religious enthusiast, on the subject of his beloved art. He says from his heart, it is angels' work on earth; and he thinks that those persons who leave that work undone, or unattempted, are behaving in a very sad manner, and he only hopes (with all his charity) that it will not be the worse for them by-and-by. He teaches a great deal, and so do his two sons and his two daughters—all industrious, clever, excellent people; but each of them immeasurably below their father in exquisite perceptions and gentle bearing.

He, or his children, teach nearly all the first families within reach of Bradford: he goes to some, and some come to him. These proud rich people sometimes do what seems to humble poor people rather mean things. Some of them will send their daughters eight or ten miles to Mr.

Winter's house in Bradford; and he has formed a weekly class, that he may receive and advance all his pupils at the same time. Thereby, these grandees save some ten shillings per head per week, and spend ten times as much coming into Bradford to shop, while their daughters are taking their lesson.

Mr. Winter has just descended into the music-room, which occupies the whole of the first floor front of his large old-fashioned house, in Prior-street; it is a warm June afternoon—all the five front windows are open; and the mignonette, that city perfume, blows fitfully in, as the green Venetian blinds stir idly to and fro.

He is dressed, to receive his class, entirely in black, and is remarkable for the spotless delicacy of his linen:—he is tall, thin, and greyhaired—one of nature's gentlemen—over-endowed with sensibilities, but, as is usually the case, extremely calm in his demeanour. He diffuses an old-fashioned perfume of lavender from his dress—he uses lavender water on his handkerchief—his features are high—his eyes mild and dark—there

is something gentle, soothing, elegant, in all he says and does.

He pauses before one of the grand pianos, and runs his thin artist's fingers along the keys—then steers between a harp and a violoncello, in the direction of his beloved and peculiar instrument, the organ, which stands enthroned on a raised dais at the head of the room.

He opens the folding-doors of that shrine of harmony—he gazes fondly on the triple row of keys—his hand shifts delicately from stop to stop—drawing out, putting back, combining the rich effects of which that peerless instrument is so prodigal. His blower has not yet arrived—he affixes the iron pedal to the side, and, as he works it, keeps his watchful eye on the fast descending telltale, then crashes into one of Haydn's most impressive movements—the "Et incarnatus" of his Imperial Mass.

"Let me blow for you, Mr. Winter," says a gentle voice at his side.

Mr. Winter is much a gentleman, but more a musician. He will not fracture his ears by taking

a chord off sharply from his beloved instrument. He lets the notes linger off one by one, till the deepest bass G alone booms and trembles along the floor, and then he rises with the air of a courtier.

A slender girl of fifteen is standing behind him —his favourite pupil, Regina Howard.

She is one of those creatures, beautiful as a dream, whom hardly any body admires. Standing now with her back to the light, her face has the dim radiance of a ground glass lamp; her sharply cut features, clear and semi-transparent like a cameo, are illumined by dark grey eyes, shadowed beneath long curved lashes as black as ink; and her dark brown hair, shining like satin, is plaited into a long tress, that encircles her head like a crown.

Mr. Winter, with his artist's perceptions of grace, thinks her adorable—other people are quite discomposed at the opaque whiteness of her skin. Mrs. Winter, who loves her, however, calls her a poor peaking thing, and is always trying to make her eat.

"My dear Miss Howard, I beg you ten thousand pardons," says Mr. Winter as they shake

hands; "I hope you have not been standing here long."

"Not half long enough; for I did not hear you begin that movement. Now I will blow, and you will be so very good as to play it me over again, and afterwards the same subject from Mozart's Twelfth Mass. I hardly know which I like the best."

"My dear lady, I cannot bear to see you blow; it is too fatiguing."

"I am quite strong enough—I have done it before when Miss Charlotte has played—and it sets your foot at liberty for the pedals."

The old man cannot resist this plea—he drops his foot on a deep sounding pedal—his long thin fingers creep like spiders among the keys—Regina listens devoutly.

It is not a long movement; but, while Mr. Winter plays it, Regina's little history can be easily told.

Five-and-thirty years ago, long before Mr. Winter lived in the great house in Prior-street, when he was struggling for a living, teaching the

violin in a little obscure tenement quite at the back of the town, his wife suggested that they should let lodgings to eke out their humble means. She was, in almost every respect, the direct opposite of her artist husband; a strong stout body who baked, and brewed, and starched, and ironed, and took the exclusive management of the material in their household, that he might be at full liberty to pursue the ideal. What a character she was! what a gossip, what a housewife, what an overflowing, open-handed, passionate reality! Well—she let her lodgings to a Frenchman, a M. de Laval, and his daughter. The great revolution had ruined them, as well as their neighbours. They had lived in Holland till their money was nearly exhausted; and, as the Dutch are not supposed to be very ready to supply that deficiency, they came to England while their funds yet enabled them to travel. Mademoiselle de Laval endeavoured to support her father by giving lessons in French. She was fortunate enough to obtain pupils, and they managed to live upon her scanty profits. Now the Winters, unlike each other in most things, had

one point of resemblance in common—their kindness of heart.

Mr. Winter would deny himself his violoncello, if he thought its incessant groans were likely to distract the beautiful Regina de Laval and her ailing father. He would much rather have denied himself his cup of tea, truly as he loved that simple refreshment. As for Mrs. Winter, she lived in a perpetual fret lest her lodgers were stinted in their meals. Her Saxon sympathies were always aroused in behalf of the hungry—indeed, I am not sure whether she distinctly understood any other kind of suffering. As she then kept no servant, the *cuisine* of her lodgers fell into her hands. She strengthened their potages, she added eggs to their omelettes—she had recourse to a hundred little harmless falsehoods, to eke out the duration of their slender household stores. She hardly knew whether to rejoice or mourn when her liberal cares were brought to a happy conclusion by the marriage of Mademoiselle de Laval with Mr. Arnold, the rector of Holmwood, a lovely village about two miles from Bradford. The acquaintance

between the two families was never suffered to die away. During the old Count de Laval's lifetime, it was his daily habit to drive into Bradford, and to enjoy a few minutes' gossip with the Winters. And Mr. Arnold, rich and well connected, was enabled to introduce Mr. Winter to a large circle of private pupils, and to obtain for him the pride and glory of his life, the blue ribbon of his profession, the organ of Great St. Benedict's.

Mrs. Arnold had now been for some years a widow. Her daughter, the mother of Regina, had died of consumption about two years after her marriage with her father's curate. Mr. Howard did not long survive her, leaving his little girl to the sole care of her grandmother. He was distantly connected with one of our high families; far too distantly to make it probable they would ever trouble themselves about an obscure descendant buried in a country parsonage.

Mr. Arnold's wealth was principally derived from his living, but he was enabled to bequeath to his widow an income of four hundred a year—enough for all her wishes, even for her charities. It

was not from meanness that she sent Regina to the class, instead of requiring the services of Mr. Winter at Holmwood. As her grand-daughter had no companions at home, she wished her to have the advantage of meeting girls of her own age occasionally, and comparing her progress with theirs. But the class was not productive of all the pleasures she intended. Regina never told her grandmama, that the girls herded together and made a party against her—but so it was. There was no reason for this. She was better born, and infinitely better taught, than any of them; but they never received her on a footing of intimacy. She was not rich enough to command their civility, she would not stoop to beg for it, and they were bitterly jealous of her qualities—of her rich soprano voice, that Mr. Winter said would make her fortune in public—of her long profusion of shining hair, her inheritance from her foreign ancestry—of her perfect French accent, which they in vain attempted to imitate—of her graceful demeanour, even when wearing the white striped shawl which they well remembered for three successive springs—above all, of that

tranquil and silent pride, which foiled their petty vulgar sarcasms, as a Milan armour turns the edge of a weapon in warding the stroke. She made them look foolish when they wanted to be clever and ill-natured. It was with some regret, therefore, that she heard footsteps approaching the door as Mr. Winter brought his last movement to a close.

The two Misses Chillingworth, large handsome girls, very stiff in all their gestures, now entered, accompanied by the three Misses Ramsay, who were singularly plain and rough in person. The Chillingworths were a great county family, excessively and stupidly proud: the Ramsays very rich and vulgar, and humbly delighted with any notice the Chillingworths might please to bestow. Then came a Miss Brown, hard-working but without an ear; a Miss Field, clever and careless; and a Miss Clark, who hated the sight of a piano, and regularly set herself against her lesson as a child sets itself against its spoonful of brimstone and treacle.

On this day, as soon as the regular lessons had

been gone through, a very important affair was to be discussed—the programme of an annual concert, given by Mr. Winter to the friends of his pupils, in which the said pupils and his own family were the sole performers. This was not so easily arranged. It was natural that Mr. Winter should desire to make Regina—his favourite pupil and infinitely the best player in the class—a prominent performer on the occasion. It was quite as natural that the Misses Chillingworth should repel the very idea of playing second to Miss Howard either in a song or concerts. The Ramsays imitated the Chillingworths, and scorned the thought of uplifting their voices in harmony with the poor Regina.

"They could not sing seconds, and their mama did not like them to play duets."

The said mama being a continual torment to Mr. Winter—such as an ignorant and suspicious woman, when she is rich and vulgar, has it in her power to be to a genuine artist.

Regina drew Mr. Winter a little on one side—

"Put me entirely out of the question, until you

have settled what all these ladies are to do, and then you will find it very easy to come to a decision. You know beforehand that *I* will sing or play whatever you please to give me."

Mr. Winter had the good sense to act upon this advice, though at some expense to his feelings. He turned to Miss Chillingworth with all his usual deference of manner—

"You have told us, dear lady, what you will *not* do," he said—"perhaps you will now tell us what you *will* do."

Miss Chillingworth suspected a little touch of irony in the remark. She looked annoyed, almost ashamed for a minute, and then selected two or three of her most difficult studies—things that had been given her to practise, without the least probability of her ever being able to master them. Mr. Winter let her do as she pleased.

The Ramsays, with a shade more of timidity in their composition, were willing to take what Mr. Winter had chosen for them. Regina was to play one of Haydn's symphonies, accompanied by Mr. Winter and his son, Mr. Richard. Miss Chilling-

worth declined being accompanied; "It made her nervous." Indeed there was a standing joke between her and Julia Ramsay on the subject of Mr. Richard, who was very ugly, with an impossible nose, and whom she suspected (very unjustly) of being hopelessly attached to her. How any one could be made nervous by Mr. Richard playing the violoncello, which sounded in his hands like a beautiful human voice, Regina could not imagine.

The Winters were so much respected, that it was not at all uncommon for the parents to take a cup of tea with them at five o'clock, when they called to fetch away their daughters.

In the low old-fashioned parlour on the ground floor, Mrs. Winter fills a copious arm-chair at the head of her well-spread table; for tea is a serious meal in her house—and Mrs. Chillingworth, seated beside her, is sipping a cup of coffee whose fragrance scents the whole room; Mr. Richard is carving a fowl; Miss Charlotte is making all haste, for she has a class in the church at six; while Miss Winter, who loves talking better than eating (though she has a class at six, too), is holding forth

upon some of her mother's good deeds. Mr. Winter pushes open the door, and ushers in his class; for the young ladies have been singing, and they always take a cup of Mrs. Winter's exquisite tea before they put on their bonnets.

Mrs. Chillingworth is a very wide flat-looking woman, with wild eyes—she accepts Regina's bow, and then, as a second thought, holds out her hand. The Ramsays greet her with ecstasy; and all take their places at the table.

Mr. Richard, though tall, and awkward, and ugly, has a touch of his father's sensibility to beauty; he cannot take his eyes off Regina, and he does not try to do so. He is certainly rather familiar in his manner—not by any means the familiarity of a shopman, but rather the whimsical bluntness of a rough original. Miss Chillingworth, who has very few perceptions, is always standing on the defensive when he approaches her, and fancying that his feelings will make him encroaching.

"Well, ma'am, am I to have the pleasure of appearing with you on the 20th?" he asks jocularly.

Miss Chillingworth stirs her tea, and becomes inarticulate.

"Don't faint, or any thing of that sort, pray," he continued audaciously, "as poor Miss Price did the night of her *début*—you remember, father, she had to play that nice little rondo by Kalkbrenner; and when she was led to the piano (I had almost said the stake), dear me, we had such a scene; the poor thing turned as white as a sheet; I believe it ended in a fit of tears though!"

Miss Chillingworth swells with indignation.

Miss Ramsay whispers to her, "Poor man!"

"I will promise you, Mr. Richard," cried Regina, "not to use my eyes for garden water-pots on this occasion—I shall trust entirely to you and Mr. Winter to conceal my blunders from the public."

The genteel part of the company look extremely disgusted at the expression Regina has used; they don't happen to remember the "grey discrowned head" from whence it came. Mr. Richard, who does, brightens up—

"I am to play with you? Come, I'm glad of that—I know you keep your time."

Miss Winter goes on steadily through all the talking, telling Mrs. Chillingworth what it is evident she does not care to hear.

"So, Mrs. Chillingworth, yesterday being my mother's birthday, she sent out sixty-nine dinners to as many poor families—baked plum-pudding and excellent roast beef, together with a quart of strong ale—as she always does on that anniversary; last year, of course the number of dinners was sixty-eight."

"And next time, Sarah (please God), it will be seventy," said Mrs. Winter with a satisfied look, folding her fat hands in front of her.

"I am quite surprised to hear that there are sixty-nine poor families in Bradford," remarked Mrs. Chillingworth, glaring through her light curls.

"So you gave a grand party, ma'am, last week," said Mrs. Winter.

"A little archery meeting for the young people," replied Mrs. Chillingworth.

"I am sure," cried one of the Ramsays, "I never saw any thing so beautiful in my life!"

"It was indeed a brilliant affair," whispered Julia—"and quite a day of triumphs to you, dear Louisa!"

"Oh, don't talk of me!" cried Miss Chillingworth, "after Lady Oswestry:—is not she a splendid creature?"

"Oh yes! and how beautifully dressed!"

"Did you see Lord Oswestry?"

"You naughty Louisa, I think I did, indeed; and I saw, too, how somebody was flirting with him."

Their voices sank to a whisper; and they giggled and glanced, for all the world like Miss Clark and Miss Brown at the other end of the table, "below the salt."

Regina's colour mounted a little. Almost every body she knew had been asked to this archery, except herself; and Mrs. Chillingworth was related to her family, that lady's mother having been first cousin to the late Mr. Arnold; she hardly knew why she should have been so carefully left out of this party. And it was the more provoking as she had never seen an archery meet-

ing, and had a great curiosity about it; and, still greater than her longing for bows and targets, was her desire to see the beautiful Lady Oswestry, of whom she remembered, when a little girl, to have heard her grandfather speak, "as the beautiful Lady Violet Montressor;" and the Oswestrys were so very seldom seen in that part of the country—they had lived abroad almost entirely since their marriage—she might never have such an opportunity again, and she had a poet's love for living beauty. She would rather, if the truth were told, have seen Lady Oswestry than the great Carlo Dolce of Burghley House. And she remembered, too, that the late Lord Oswestry had been her grandfather's intimate friend, and had presented him to the living of Holmwood. She felt almost as if there was some connection between her and the Oswestrys, and thought it a great shame that she alone, of all the neighbourhood, should have been denied the opportunity of seeing them.

She could not help listening through all that Mr. Richard was telling her about the clock symphony

which she was learning for the concert, to all the scraps that met her ear about these Oswestrys :— she found that they declared they had never seen a prettier fête—that they were quite sorry they were going down the Rhine, they would so like to have made riding parties with the Chillingworths. This idea seemed to have come from Lord Oswestry, who was likewise supposed to have complimented Miss Chillingworth on the dazzling complexion which he was sure was the result of her being so good a horsewoman. She likewise heard every inch of Lady Oswestry's dress enumerated, together with the braided tunic of the little Lord Exmoor, and the delicate muslin frock of Lady Violet. After a whole litany ot interjections upon the beauty of these fabrics, she was quite startled by hearing Julia Ramsay say—

"But, my dear Louisa, did you *ever* in your life see any thing so absurd as Winny Hopper looked, with that short gown of hers, and her bonnet tilted over her nose?"

"Poor old thing!" rejoined Miss Chillingworth.

"It is very strange that elderly females will come to those places, especially if they don't know how to dress," cried Julia.

"Which they never do"—added her friend.

"Miss Hopper!" exclaimed Regina.

"Yes—your *friend*, Miss Hopper," remarked Miss Chillingworth, with something of a malicious accent in her voice: "you should give her a hint, my dear, to leave off some of those singular odds and ends, with which she astonishes our weak minds when she is in full toilet."

"If she were my friend perhaps I might," said Regina steadily—"but I thought, though I know but little of her, that she did not go out to gay parties."

"Oh! but you know she has left off being pious;" cried Miss Ramsay. "She was at Mrs. Lee's ball in the winter."

"Yes! and though she did not dance herself, she sat smiling while we all galopaded over her feet," added Miss Chillingworth.

"She has not been pious since your grandpapa's time," said Eliza, the youngest Ramsay; "and yet

she is all in all with the Millers, who are the lowest of low church people," remarked Miss Chillingworth.

"She is a mystery to me," said Regina quietly. "I suppose you know she is trying her very hardest to become Mrs. Morley, your rector's wife?" said Sophia, Miss Chillingworth's quiet sister.

"At her age, too!" exclaimed Julia Ramsay; "isn't it disgusting?"

"She has worked him a pair of slippers, with a cross on the toes, to my certain knowledge," laughed Eliza.

Mrs. Chillingworth seemed to catch some fragments of this discourse, for she turned to Regina, and glaring, as she always did whenever she addressed any one, she said—

"I did not ask you, my dear, because I know Mrs. Arnold does not like these gay parties; and, really, we never have any quiet little affairs such as she would enjoy."

Regina smiled and bowed; for she did not know what other reply to make.

And now they were all going away. Mrs. Chil-

lingworth's great carriage rolled to the door. The Ramsays' greater footman arrived to walk home behind them; and Regina's humble Beckey, amid the sneers of her companions, gathered her young lady's music under one arm, while she poised on the other a wicker basket, in which she had just deposited some needful household purchases.

"Now, you take that clock movement slow and sure," quoth Mr. Richard, as he opened the door for Regina; "and you see if we don't let them know what's o'clock on the 20th. I only wish old Haydn could hear us!"

CHAPTER II.

It is a bright still June evening. The hedges are gay with dog-roses, and the air sweet with honeysuckles and new-mown grass. The mighty oaks on Holmwood common turn into gold, as the sun sinks behind their wide branches. The stillness deepens—all the tints in the distant country assume a softer hue—now a bird on the wing flutters past to a bush—now a lark rushes down to his nest in the heather. A little old lady, all in fresh black silk and white lawn, is seen winding her way among the tall ferns. She is the prettiest old woman in the world; delicately fair, with a little bloom like rouge just on the turn of the cheek, and blue eyes as bright and searching as a child's. The old lady stops and shades her eyes with her hand; for there is that quiver in the

atmosphere which belongs to the misty summer heat. She walks a little farther, and stops again; a thrush is singing, and, until the bird finishes his strain without the delicious gurgle, she thinks it is the note of the nightingale. At last she sees, all among the golden broom, the slight elastic figure of a young girl, bearing a handful of wild-flowers, hastening towards her. It is Regina, followed close by the substantial form of Becky Halliday.

"Dear granny, look at the honeysuckles I have gathered for you."

"My Regina! has all gone well with you to-day?"

"Oh yes! Mr. Winter is always contented with me; but, granny, do you know that Miss Hopper went to Mrs. Chillingworth's archery fête?" cried Regina, beginning at once with the subject that filled her mind.

"I did not know it, my dear; but it does not surprise me."

"Grandmama, Mrs. Chillingworth said that you did not approve of gay parties, and therefore she had not asked me. Is it so?"

"I would have allowed you to go with pleasure,

my love, had you been invited. I cannot think it well for people to spend their lives in company, without time for thought, for reading, or for serving their poorer neighbours; but you, my Regina, can see the difference between passing your life in that manner, and perhaps going to a ball or a breakfast once in a season."

"I thought at the time, granny, it was an excuse."

"I dare say Mrs. Chillingworth thought I should object, my dear. Your grandpapa and I never entered into much gaiety—it was not his wish. His interests were so totally embarked in his duties, that society, unless of a quiet kind, seemed to jar with his daily occupations; and a stroll on the common refreshed his mind more than a gay party could have done. He was called, what he never ventured to call himself, an Evangelical clergyman—a class who seem now to be somewhat out of repute. But, to go back to the archery—accept, my dear Regina, whenever they ask you. It is very right that you should see a little of the world."

"But they don't ask me, granny!"

"Why then, my child, if you are a philosopher," said the old lady archly, "you will content yourself with staying at home."

Regina had a happy temper, that did not long make a grievance of any thing. She laughed and turned the subject.

"Mrs. Winter sends her best duty to you, granny, and begs that you will give me a beefsteak for supper."

Mrs. Arnold joined in the laugh—"And yet you are not so very thin and pale, my child," she said, looking at the beautiful carmine colour that exercise had brought into Regina's transparent cheek.

"I look so pitiful beside the great Misses Chillingworth," laughed Regina; "they are so stout and fresh; but they drink beer, which I don't like."

"Ah! this time I am not mistaken;" said Mrs. Arnold, pausing near a thicket of hawthorns —"that *is* the note of the nightingale."

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird,
No hungry generations tread thee down:
The voice I hear this passing night, was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown.
Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
To the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn."

The old lady repeated these lines in a sweet clear voice, without the slightest foreign accent, unless a more careful and distinct pronunciation of our noble language might betray that she had not altogether reached that native point of familiarity which merges into contempt and negligence.

"It *is* sad, like all beautiful things," said Regina.

"It is *new*, like all beautiful things," returned the grandmama.

And they stood still to listen, as if it were a fresh song, a newly discovered bird; and Becky grounded her basket, and stared at them in wonder, for "she did not see why a little whiffling bit of a bird, which her missis could hear any night, should keep her out in the damp like that."

For it requires cultivation to appreciate the simplest pleasures.

They were drawing near to a pretty grove of

fir-trees which skirted a house situated in the very middle of the common. This secluded dwelling was supposed to be inhabited by an old miser of fabulous wealth, and very retired habits. Others said it belonged to some rich proprietor in the neighbouring county, who left it to the care of a couple of old servants. At any rate the grounds were carefully enclosed by a high wall, which scarcely allowed the roof and upper windows to be visible. The fir-tree walk was well known to all the nursemaids and children about Holmwood, and had been the favourite resort of Regina, at a time when she built houses and made fireplaces among the roots of the old trees. There was a wicket-gate cut in the wall with a stone step in front, which Regina never could pass without thinking of the Arabian Nights, and the doors in their garden walls.

"I really feel ashamed every time I pass that gate," cried Regina.

"I don't wonder; naughty little thing that you were, my Regina."

"Grandmama!"

"What is it, my love?"

"Some one within the wall echoed my name; did not you hear 'Regina' quite plainly? The miser must be come back."

"Speak lower, then, my child; don't behave as badly as you did seven years ago."

"There, grandmama! I saw a face at the wicket!"

"My dear child, you are quite nervous this evening; there's nothing but the iron grating—look again."

"It was only for the moment; but I'm sure I saw a thin old face. What is it, I wonder, that I feel sometimes—as if there had been, or would be, a link between me and some people? I have that feeling whenever I hear of the Oswestrys; but what is there in common between me and the old miser?"

"A great deal, I think. He must recollect you as a very saucy little girl," laughed the old lady.

For, seven years ago, when Regina was playing with some other children at the foot of those old firs, it chanced that some of them cast their eyes

up to a cherry-tree that stood within the mysterious garden, laden with beautiful waxen fruit.

"If the miser would but give us some cherries!" cried one child.

"Yes—even a miser might spare us one handful! It would be only taking them from the birds."

"You would not dare to knock at the door and ask him!"

"Nor you!"

"Nor Regina!"

"Yes, I would."

"Ah! what would you say?"

"You shall hear," replied the little girl, as she mounted the stone step and knocked at the wicket.

The children gathered round breathless; a miser, an ogre, a giant, something quite different from other human beings, dwelt behind that wall.

"It is of no use, Regina!"

"Nobody hears you!"

"I don't believe there *is* a miser!" echoed from the little group.

Regina knocked again. There was another pause.

"We must knock three times at all fairy places!" she exclaimed, turning to her companions, and then the giant comes out and says—

"What do you want?" asked a voice as the wicket opened.

Regina almost slipped off the step with surprise, but she answered boldly—

"Miser—miser—my name's Regina, and I want some cherries!"

The person at the gate must have been just gathering some, for the edge of a basket was raised to the open wicket, and a shower of pink and white cherries fell at her feet. The wicket closed at the same instant, and she remembered how she stood gazing at it, while the others seized the spoil, and sat feasting in a circle on the ground.

"You were always an odd little thing," said Mrs. Arnold; "and you are just the same now. I don't know what I shall do with you."

"You don't believe in my fancies, grandmama; and yet I have one at this moment—I feel as if something were going to happen."

"'By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes,'"

returned Mrs. Arnold, laughing.

"Oh, grandmama! how *à propos!*" cried Regina; "for there goes Miss Hopper, arm-in-arm with Mr. Brand, the curate!"

"My dear Regina!" interposed Mrs. Arnold gently, "I had not the least idea that Miss Hopper was in sight, I am sure."

"Then why does she shuffle round the corner, with her head down in that way, to avoid you? Why did she not come forward when she saw you (as she did), and speak to you—you, the best friend she ever had?" cried Regina, glowing with indignation. "Why has she supplanted you at the rectory, at the schools—your own schools that you founded;—with your old acquaintances, the Millers? Did not she tell Mrs. Miller that you were a Catholic, and had a crucifix in your bedroom? and did not she declare to Mr. Morley, that you were a more bitter Huguenot than any of your ancestors? that you had roast beef on a Friday, and would not give her any wool for the church carpet?

Has not she set against you almost every family in Holmwood? As for her own church creed, Mr. James Ramsay was not far from the mark when he said, she was 'High, low, jack, and the game,' as best suited her purpose."

"My dear, dear Regina, we know nothing of all this—we ought to judge charitably; and here comes Dame Robins, very opportunely I think, to put an end to your tirade."

Dame Robins, the hostess of the pretty rustic inn called the Great Bear, a neat fresh middle-aged woman, tripped across the road to meet them.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Robins; do you wish to speak with me?" asked the old lady.

"Why, yes, if you please, I did, Madam Arnold," said the rosy dame, rubbing up one corner of her snowy apron to assist her speech. "You see to-day is the grand Bradford ploughing-match, and a many of the farmers who come from a distance, they stay the night either here or at the Star at Bradford, and every bed I had was bespoke may be ten days or a fortnight ago. And a Bradford

coach just now sets a lady down at my door—a real lady, in bad health seemingly, and quite worn out with a long journey; and, finding we can't accommodate her for the night, she wishes to get a lodging in the village rather than go on any farther—but you know, Madam Arnold, lodgings are not plenty with us."

"They are not indeed, Mrs. Robins. I don't know really—you say the lady is respectable."

"I'll warrant that, Madam Arnold; I see too many of all sorts to make a mistake in that matter."

"Then I will beg the lady to accept a night's lodging at my house; and Regina, my love, make haste home with Becky and get all ready for a guest."

The good hostess showed Mrs. Arnold into her little parlour, smelling very vilely of stale tobacco, where a lady was seated in an uneasy wooden chair, from which she half rose in answer to Mrs. Robins' blunt form of introduction.

"I learn, madam, that you are disappointed in obtaining rooms to-night in our little village inn,

may I hope that you will accept from a stranger this trifling accommodation? Be assured, madam, that, although my hospitality is of the simplest, it is very heartily offered," said Mrs. Arnold with her musical accent, and a charming expression of entreaty in her gesture.

"Dear madam, I hardly know how to be grateful enough for your opportune kindness," returned the lady, rising; "illness makes one very encroaching. I confess myself exhausted; and I accept your very obliging proposal as frankly as it is made. I must name myself to you as Mrs. Ward. I am seeking here a very retired and quiet spot for the recovery of my health, that is my motive for—for leaving town at this season. And I think the first proof I can give of my grateful feelings will be to hurry out of this atmosphere, as disagreeable, I am sure, to you as to myself."

The extreme beauty of the lady, her very graceful deportment, and, above all, that unmistakeable air of birth, which did not abound among the fair inhabitants of Holmwood, acted upon Mrs. Arnold like a spell.

"Come, dear madam, I am anxious to possess you," she rejoined in a lively tone. "If you will permit, I will direct that your luggage shall be carried to my house."

"This carpet-bag and that dressing-case are all my luggage," said the lady in a firm tone, and fixing her clear regard upon Mrs. Arnold's face.

"One porter, then, will suffice," returned Mrs. Arnold; "in that way, you will not lose sight of your property, as he shall walk by our side."

A gleam of pleasure lighted up the lady's noble face. She knew the world well enough to feel a glad surprise at meeting with a person who did not measure her respectability by the weight of her worldly goods. It certainly was a desperate action, and one that had results of which Mrs. Arnold little dreamed, to offer a weary woman the shelter of her roof for a whole night, without an exchange of visiting cards, or even a letter of introduction: the sort of thing that might do very well in Arabia or in the Sandwich Islands, but which made every lady's hair stand on end throughout the adjacent parishes of Holmwood and Dingleby.

But what would you have? It was only a French-woman! It was your duty to be fierce, but not astonished, at any thing she might please to do; and she cared no more for your black looks than if she had not seen them. She was as hardened as a marquise of the Regency.

Meantime the old lady, always mild and calm, threw open her garden gate, and begged the stranger to enter.

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Arnold's house stood in a small court, shaded by lime-trees planted outside the open paling; it faced the common, which was so enriched with clumps of oak, with hawthorn, broom, and fern, as to resemble a fine extent of park scenery. The street door opened at once into a hall paved with small squares of marble, panelled with wood painted white, with a massive decorated chimneypiece, and a grate composed of two brass andirons. A glass door at the farther end led into a smaller hall, paved also with little chequered squares of black and white marble, which opened directly into the trim old-fashioned garden, and which was used as a kind of green-house, to shelter geraniums and other delicate plants through the winter.

To the right of the hall was a comfortable dining-room, with deep old-fashioned cupboards on each side of the fireplace: a wide Dutch-looking staircase, with thick balustrades painted black and white, led up by easy stages to the cheerful drawing-room, where Regina, seated at the tea-table, was impatiently expecting her grandmama and her guest.

"You are welcome, madam, to my little home," said Mrs. Arnold as she ushered in the stranger, "and this is my grandchild, Regina."

"Regina!" echoed the lady in a sweet languid tone: "my name is Regina, too."

Regina, who had come forward to help the lady to throw aside her walking things, now looked up into the most beautiful face she had ever beheld. It was a perfect oval, with large deeply set eyes, and thick white lids. The features were purely Grecian, and the broad white forehead was just edged with a line of black hair, drawn quite off under a rich lace cap. Her complexion was brilliant—her soft rose-tinted cheeks seemed to deepen the dark blue of the eyes and the inky

blackness of the long lashes—her teeth were dazzling, and her carefully cut lips red as cornelian.

"What can be more refreshing than tea after a weary journey?" remarked Mrs. Ward, as she raised her cup with a hand white as alabaster.

"I agree with you, though I am a Frenchwoman," replied her hostess. "I prefer tea to coffee at all times."

"You, dear madam, a Frenchwoman? How beautifully you speak our language!"

"It has been the language of all my great joys, my great sorrows; I ought therefore to speak it well," said the old lady, quietly.

"And what a charming retreat! What a dear old-fashioned garden! And this pretty room, so enriched with pictures!" said Mrs. Ward, glancing round at some beautiful small paintings that hung on the walls.

"They are but copies," replied Mrs. Arnold.

"And grandmama copied them all," cried Regina, "from original pictures in the possession of different friends—when we *had* friends."

"My naughty Regina!" exclaimed Mrs. Arnold, shaking her head

Mrs. Ward looked inquiring.

"While Mr. Arnold lived," explained Mrs. Arnold with a half smile, "we were at the Rectory, a large house with good grounds, and kept a regular establishment, instead of Becky and Marianne. Mr. Arnold had a wide circle of connections and friends. Without being exactly gay, we received very often; and you can easily imagine, my dear madam, by casting your eyes around you, that all this opulence is at an end, and that we have very naturally dropped out of sight of the neighbourhood."

"I can imagine," returned Mrs. Ward, "that it requires a superior mind to estimate Mrs. Arnold's qualities; and that ordinary people might find no especial temptation to seek her society."

"Shall I ask Mrs. Ward if *she* is a Frenchwoman? What she says is too obliging," said Mrs. Arnold with a graceful bow.

"And do you inherit your grandmama's talent for painting?" asked Mrs. Ward, turning to Regina.

"I like drawing even better than music," she replied; "but heads are my study—I do not sketch. If you are fond of music, I hope we shall often play and sing together."

"Music is my passion. I shall have plenty of leisure, and I trust our acquaintance is only begun."

"Oh! I hope so—that would be delightful!" cried Regina, eagerly.

"Do you think, Mrs. Arnold, I have any chance of finding a lodging to suit me near this place?" asked Mrs. Ward.

"It strikes me that, at Dykeham farm, they would be glad to let two or three rooms," said Mrs. Arnold. "It is, certainly, buried among woods and fields, completely out of the high-road, or any road, in fact."

"The very thing I wish: I shall not be traced there."

Regina lifted her large grey eyes with a wondering look.

"My dear little girl," said Mrs. Ward, meeting her eye, "be very careful whom you marry."

Regina answered by a vague glance—the danger was not palpable to her imagination.

Mrs. Arnold, with the Arab feeling of hospitality before alluded to, was anxious not to surprise the secret of her guest, and turned the conversation upon art again.

"You see, Mrs. Ward, by my attempts, that I am an admirer of the Venetian school; perhaps you are a convert to the pre-Raphaelite imitators?"

"No, really; I see but little merit in outrageous postures or ugly faces; nor do I know how nature is imitated by giving to every twig and fold the minuteness they would assume if held close before the eye, to be copied in turn. It appears to me, that these artists have chosen to forget what Francia and Masaccio had not yet learned—the effect of atmosphere upon every object far or near. I can fancy one of these fathers of art addressing our innovators as Hamlet did Polonius—'For yourself, sir, shall be as old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward.'"

The conversation, once engaged in so wide a

field as that of art, became still more interesting to the three amateurs.

Ancient and modern painters—schools of colour —sketches, engravings, outline illustrations—were in turn discussed; then the lives of painters, thence to biography; from the lives of poets to their poetry; till at last Mrs. Arnold started up.

"My dear Regina, we are keeping up our guest in the most unconscionable manner with our gossip."

"The time has passed so pleasantly," remarked Mrs. Ward, opening a little watch in her bracelet, "that I could not have believed it was past ten o'clock. But I will not detain my fair torch-bearer. Good-night, dear madam; with many thanks."

"Oh! grandmama, what a dazzling creature!" cried Regina, as she entered the old lady's dressing-room, where she was fidgeting, according to her wont, among the drawers of an Indian cabinet, in which various articles of lace lay perfumed by the sandal-wood; "I hope you are as much enchanted as I am."

"Indeed, my dear, I have seldom seen any one so prepossessing."

"And I am sure, granny, you will tell me who she is, even if it is to be kept a secret."

"I know no more about her, my love, than you do. It is evident, from something she let fall, that it is her object to live in great seclusion, and, therefore, the less we mention her to the neighbours the better, my child; because, if they make her coming here the general topic of conversation, there is no knowing how far it may spread."

"So I think, grandmama. If Winny Hopper injures this exquisite creature, I'll—what could I do to punish her? She is impervious; she has not a nerve in her body; you cannot shame her, you can't baffle her. If you shut the door in her face, she would cringe through the keyhole."

"Stop, stop, my dear Regina! I was just thinking about Winny. If she has heard that we have a guest, she is very likely to call to-morrow."

"Very likely, indeed, grandmama; one of those chances you may safely count upon. And, if you chance to be gone to Dykeham farm with Mrs. Ward, as I hope you will, I shall have the pleasure of receiving Miss Hopper."

"And you will be polite, my little Regina; do not let your feelings carry you away."

"I never did, grandmama. When she said I called her a toady, it was not true. We were talking at the Ramsays' about some book, and I said there was no character so detestable as that of a toady. It was not even my word—I quoted it from the book; and she burst into tears, and asked me if I alluded to her?"

"And what did you say, unfortunate child?"

"Why, granny, I confess I was rather naughty. I did feel so disgusted at the whole scene, particularly at the tears as big as peas that rolled off her nose, that I sat in an angry silence, and would not explain; while Mrs. Ramsay fed her with lumps of sugar steeped in lavender drops; and little Eliza, who is very good-natured, brought the book, Miss Edgeworth's moral tales, and shewed Winny the story."

"Well, go to bed, madcap; and sleep if you can, after all your adventures."

"I fear I am not very punctual," said Mrs. Ward, as she entered the breakfast-room the next

morning, with a sealed letter in her hand; "but I was so eager to let my son know my proceedings, and particularly the kindness I so unexpectedly met with, that as soon as I awoke I began to write, and have just completed my letter and my toilet together."

While Mrs. Arnold replied by some old-fashioned and cordial inquiries after her guest's health, sleep, comforts, and so forth, Regina gazed, in the breathless admiration which a girl sometimes feels for a beautiful woman, upon Mrs. Ward's lovely face. It reminded her of the portraits, and still more the descriptions, of Mary, queen of Scots—a face in which the pure outlines and brilliant colours were subordinate to the exquisite sweetness of expression—languid, gracious, loving, womanly in its minutest details. Her figure, too, above the common height, and just full enough to round off every movement into perfect grace, resembled equally the mien and stature of that unhappy queen; and Regina began to pour out the tea in a sort of dream, thinking of Mary, and Darnley, and Scott's Abbot; and wondering whether Mrs. Ward

was married to such a man as Bothwell, and where her little boy lived—with his cruel father, perhaps, or some relations, who persecuted his mother for some unknown cause.

"My love," said Mrs. Arnold, "just run out into the hall with Mrs. Ward's letter; Field will take it to the post when he comes in from milking. He is our 'odd man,'" she added, turning to her guest; "and I can assure you that he in his time plays many parts, from cleaning knives to rearing water-melons."

Regina took the letter, which was legibly addressed to "John Dods, Post-Office, Glascow."

If she dropped it on the tablecloth like a red-hot iron, and took it up again blushing more crimson than a camelia, her only excuse was, that she had never been so startled by a name.

"I'm so cautious, you see, that I write under cover to a person who will forward my letter," remarked Mrs. Ward, as if she was replying to Regina's thought.

"Oh!" said Regina to herself, as she laid the letter on the slab in the hall, "how could I accuse

that peerless beauty, even for a moment, of being named Mrs. Dods?"

"Then, if you approve, Mrs. Ward," Mrs. Arnold was saying as she came back, "we will walk to Dykeham, as the morning is fine, and see about your lodgings; but I warn you, that, until every thing is arranged in them to your satisfaction, I shall detain you here as my prisoner."

"Never was there a more willing prisoner, my dear madam, nor one more grateful," said the lady, pressing Mrs. Arnold's hands in her own; "I will put on my bonnet, and join you in a moment—but does not my namesake go with us?"

"I should like nothing better if I had not a great deal to do at home," exclaimed Regina; "besides, I am left to defend the castle while grandmama is out. I expect an attack from Winny Hopper."

"One of your village gossips?" inquired the lady.

"Only a neighbour," interrupted Mrs. Arnold mildly, "who might be a little curious."

"And, if this valiant constable were from home, what would Mrs. Hopper achieve?" asked Mrs. Ward, turning to Regina.

"*Miss* Hopper," said Regina with emphasis, "would then cross-examine Marianne for half an hour on the name, appearance, state, and retinue of our guest; and she would draw her own conclusions from Marianne's conclusions, and would go with them to Mr. Morley and Mr. Brand (the rector and curate); and then, having rested her suspicions in the bosom of the church, her conscience would be at peace."

"I quite long to see your Miss Hopper," said Mrs. Ward, stroking Regina's polished hair with her snowy fingers; "I have often fancied that the intrigues of a village would be as amusing as those of a court."

"They are amusing only to a by-stander," laughed Regina; "grandmama may shake her head, but she can't deny that it is sharp work to find yourself in the midst of these football players: it is in vain that you protest against playing—they will insist on mixing you up in the game."

"Is she saucy?" cried Mrs. Arnold; "come, Mrs. Ward, it is quite time for us to leave this censorious little girl."

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"Grandmama, I see Miss Hopper coming across the common; take your keys and your gloves, and fly!"

"And you, my dear Regina, be civil!"

"As an orange, grandmama—through the glass door—that is right! They are gone—and—I thought so—a ring at the bell—now for Winny Hopper!"

CHAPTER IV.

Balzac alone could have done justice to the character of Winny Hopper. I approach with diffidence a subject that ought to have been consigned to his skilful hands. He would have dissected, analyzed, combined, all the elements of her disposition; and the truth and minuteness of his painting, would have made amends for its want of beauty. I really believe, and I'm making a great concession, that Winny wanted to go to Heaven by and by—there was no hurry; but she wanted to have it all her own way upon earth as well. To accomplish this twofold end, she took up the pious line of business. She gave a great deal of her time, and a very little of her money, to the wants of her poorer neighbours; she had been attached in her day to a good many clergymen,

and this habit of mind gave her always a friend at headquarters; for clergymen, like other men, have no objection to be adored, although, like other men, they really cannot accept every lady who makes them an offer. Winny made them a good many offers—with her eyes, be it understood—which for some years had rolled their sugary glances upon her reverend friends in vain.

Winny was the happiest creature on the face of the globe; and, I am afraid I must add, the meanest—she was neither sick nor sorry.

When she lost her relations, it was of no consequence; if they went on badly, she wrapped the cloak of her selfishness more closely round her; and, so long as they didn't spend her money, which they would have found it hard to do, she left it all to Providence, like a pious soul as she was, and took care not to fret. Ten years ago, if you had been called upon to point out the most insignificant being in Holmwood, you would have mentioned Winny; now she ruled the village, ruled the charities, ruled the clubs and schools—but she could not rule Mrs. Arnold—and so she

hated her instead. She hated Regina, as Mrs. Arnold's grandchild; she hated the Winters, as her early friends; she hated even Becky Halliday, Mrs. Arnold's cook and housekeeper; and Winny was a good hater, if she was good at nothing else.

She had still a deeper reason for the bitter feelings with which she regarded Regina Howard. It was not by any means her fault that she was not Regina's mamma.

During Mr. Arnold's life, while Mrs. Arnold was, as a matter of course, the most highly considered lady in the village, she had no slave so humble as Winny Hopper.

Mrs. Hopper, the widow of an inferior tradesman, a quiet, weak woman, came to settle at Holmwood with her only daughter; and Mrs. Arnold, finding that the other families rather hung back from visiting a person whom they did not consider as perfectly genteel, took her by the hand, and made her welcome among the exclusives of the village. Winny was then about the age of her own daughter, and she proved herself so humble and eager, so anxious to be employed in the

schools, so glad to run of errands (genteel errands, be it understood), that Mrs. Arnold, appreciating so much industry and kindness of heart, rather encouraged an intimacy between Miss Hopper and her own beautiful daughter. Regina Arnold, perfectly amiable and well-bred, was aware that she could not consistently allow a young lady to teach her class in the Sunday school, and to carry her messages to the Ramsays and the Millers, without treating her in all respects as an equal; walking with her, lending her books and patterns; in fact, making a return for her civilities. These were accepted with rapture, and with a gratitude that looked a little servile—she always seemed as if she would have thankfully darned all the Arnold stockings to express her devotion.

The first thing that disturbed this happy interchange of feeling, was an attachment that Miss Hopper was so unlucky as to form to the young curate, Mr. Howard, who, very perversely, was devoted heart and hand to Miss Arnold: and very much perplexed and annoyed the whole Arnold family were, when, through the medium of her

mother, Winny announced to them the state of her feelings. She sighed and wept; she even had recourse to rhyme, in which she upbraided Miss Arnold with not acting the part of a true friend, and resigning her lover to the one who (she said) loved him best. But this offence she forgave in time, for she had not yet done with the Arnolds; and perhaps her forgiveness was all the easier, as Mr. Howard was the third clergyman she had loved in vain. But when Mr. Arnold died, and Mrs. Arnold retired to the red brick house on the common, then Winny began to look about her. The new rector was a high churchman, and regarded his low predecessor with Popish bitterness. It followed, then, that he looked with a most suspicious eye upon the relict of the late Mr. Arnold. All that she said and did fell under his ban; but, unluckily, all that she did not say and did not do, proved equally offensive. Winny went over to the enemy at once; she became his spy and his trumpeter, his almoner and his maid of all work. He came to Holmwood twice a widower, with a family of nine children; but the living was good;

his two wives had been rich; and Winny's eyes began to roll again, with hope to inspire their dulcet glances.

Now I must confess, as I would not willingly depict a faultless character, that Regina detested Miss Hopper. Not because she had told Mr. Morley that Regina was an unfit companion for his seven daughters—not because she had told Mr. Brand that Regina had laughed at him—not because she had made Mrs. Miller believe that Regina was an undutiful child to her grandmother —not even because she had said, in several places, that Regina was attached to Mr. Richard Winter. These distinct falsehoods Regina would not have been at the trouble to contradict, scarcely to remember; but her constant and vexatious hostility to Mrs. Arnold—*that* Regina never could forgive! Every little plan of usefulness or of kindness that Mrs. Arnold had set on foot in the village, that Miss Hopper, with Mr. Morley's consent, regularly overturned; and, to heighten the indignity, she always came to inform Mrs. Arnold of these changes, and to descant on Mr.

Morley's great skill and wisdom. On these occasions Regina's indignation, when not speechless, was apt to be sarcastic, and it required all Mrs. Arnold's gentleness and tact to keep the peace. For Mrs. Arnold did not hate Winny. She had done her so many kindnesses, that she could not help feeling some interest in her; she thought her mistaken, forgetful, awkward, any thing but base.

"Grandmama in, Regina?" squeaked Miss Hopper, shaking hands as she entered.

"No; she is out walking," returned Regina, bearing, as she best might, the infliction of being called by her name, and giving her hand to a person she disliked.

"I just called with a message from Mr. Morley," Winny pursued. "He does not approve the hymn-book grandmama gave to the school children; so she won't be surprised that there is another in use."

"It is some years since grandmama gave any book to the schools," said Regina coldly; "and nothing will surprise her that comes from Mr. Morley." Miss Hopper rolled her eyes as if they went on wires, and, not knowing how to answer,

sighed—"There is one little point that Mr. Morley thinks odd, particularly in a *clergyman's* widow," said Winny; "grandmama gives the almswomen soup every Friday."

"She does;" and Regina became still colder.

"Well, Mr. Morley thinks——"

"He thinks——" said Regina, impatiently.

"The church thinks——" added Winny.

Regina's pulse beat faster.

"As Friday is an appointed fast-day——"

"The church thinks, and Mr. Morley thinks, that the *soupe* should be *maigre!*" exclaimed Regina, no longer able to keep silent; "but this is Becky's affair, not ours, Miss Hopper! It is not we who stir the saucepans. Let Mr. Morley condescend to write a receipt for Becky, and let it be signed by all the almswomen, for their consciences ought to be studied,—there was a time, you know, when it looked ugly to fast on Fridays; and let him still further condescend to express his wishes in person, and grandmama will give him an answer."

Winny rolled her eyes, and said, "For such a

young person, it did not look well to have any opinions: that the church was our mother."

"I don't profess any opinion whatever about the church," cried Regina. "Clever men are wrangling bitterly enough about church questions, without our joining in the quarrel, Miss Hopper: it is not as if other subjects were scarce."

"True!" squeaked Winny, and she had a most unnatural voice, like all false persons. "Who was that lady, Regina, that I saw walking with you and grandmama on the common yesterday?" Now Regina knew, that when Winny had met them they were alone, but she had heard afterwards some rumour about Mrs. Ward, and put her question in that form, like a fox as she was.

"When I saw you, we were walking with Becky," laughed Regina; "an excellent cook, but no lady, even in these days when ladies are scarce."

"It was not Becky," said Miss Hopper.

"I beg your pardon," insisted Regina; "but when we saw you walking arm-in-arm with Mr. Brand (Miss Hopper blushed), we were closely

followed by Becky, who carried my music-book for me; and no one else."

"Mr. Morley told me this morning——" remarked Miss Hopper.

"Told you that you had seen a lady walking with us?" asked Regina.

"That you had a lady staying with you."

"Indeed!"

"But I suppose he was mistaken——"

"He could not be. Mr. Morley, you know!"

"Well then, Regina, you *have* a lady guest?"

"But I don't yet understand, Miss Hopper, what Mr. Morley and you have settled about us. Is it that we are to consider Becky a lady? or that it was not Becky, but some unknown person, whom you saw with us? or are we suspected of harbouring the said unknown person, who is unpleasing to the church?"

"I am afraid you are a bad girl, Regina," said Winny, screwing up her eyes with some attempt at jocularity; "but I suppose there is no *mystery* about this lady?"

"But we have not made out the lady yet, Miss

Hopper; and, talking of ladies, is it true that Mr. Morley is going to be married again?"

"No," said Winny, turning scarlet; "where did you hear that? who is the lady?"

"I heard it at Bradford—a very pretty young woman, they said, with fifty thousand pounds."

"Do you think it is true?" asked Winny, and one tear began to travel slowly down her cheek. Now Regina had heard the report at Bradford, and thought nothing about it—reports were not scarce in a country town; but she could not help saying, unmoved by the tear, "I dare say it is; for they mentioned at the same time that the lady was a zealous Puseyite."

"I don't know what you mean by Puseyite!" sobbed Winny; "perhaps you will give me an explanation of the word."

"I'll give you Sydney Smith's explanation of Puseyism willingly," answered Regina, "and then you know the adjective will be easily understood:—'A religion of posture and imposture, of circumflection and genuflection, of bowings to the

east and courtesyings to the west, and such like absurdities.'" *

Winny was now in tears, partly caused by this attack upon her new religion, which is always much dearer to people than their old one; but still more by the chance of Mr. Morley being appropriated by another lady.

But even this melting sight failed to touch Regina's heart. "Bah! she has always Mr. Brand to fall back upon if she loses the other; after all, what does it matter?" she thought. And, though her brain was filled with strange fancies and romantic notions, on this particular subject her feelings were very crude.

"If a person loves you, what more do you want? and, if he does not love you, he could never make you happy, nor you him. Therefore, what would you have in either case? It's 'simple *comme bonjour.*'"

While these thoughts passed through her mind, Winny blew her nose, and tried to compose herself.

* From a sermon preached by him at St. Paul's Cathedral.

"Did you, Regina, hear the lady's name?" she sobbed.

A Miss Cutler, whose father is a dealer in hardware in Prior-street; but it was told me at the Winters' merely as a piece of gossip."

"Now, I think, Regina, that is not likely," quoth Winny, after a pause. "Miss Cutler is not high enough for Mr. Morley. I think I need not be afraid; and I *should* be sorry, on account of dear Annie Morley, who is nearly eighteen now."

"Miss Morley has seen her mother replaced once; perhaps it would not be so bad a second time," said Regina.

"No, as you say!" exclaimed Winny, brightening up; "but then it ought to be an older person; Miss Cutler is so very young, not above two or three and twenty; and, as for any body in trade, you know that is quite out of the question for Mr. Morley." And Winny's father had kept a toy-shop! But that she had long forgotten.

By this time, Regina began to think that their agreeable little conversation had lasted long enough, and to wish very much that Winny would go.

But Miss Hopper was equally determined to stay, hoping that something might turn up to gratify her curiosity; for she had pledged herself to Mr. Morley to bring him some tidings of the mysterious lady.

"Well, Regina, how do you get on with your music?" she asked.

(Winny carried out Shakspeare's idea, and hated it.)

"Very well, thank you; I am very busy just now, practising for Mr. Winter's concert."

"Must not practise *too* long," cried Winny; "young people are so apt to give too much time to a mere accomplishment."

"I thought that hint about practising would have loosened her, but she clings like a limpet, and they will be home if she stays much longer; what shall I do?" said Regina to herself.

"And how is Mr. Richard?" inquired Winny.

"Very well, and very happy—you will be delighted to hear that he has got the organ of St. Olive's, in the new town; his father is so pleased!"

Now Regina knew that, when Mr. Morley first

came to Holmwood, Mrs. Arnold had written to him, warmly requesting that Mr. Richard might be preferred to the post of organist, which then happened to be vacant; but Winny carried the day against Mr. Richard, whom she disliked for the following reasons. It chanced that she was walking into Bradford just as Mr. Richard was driving out; she dressed badly, and walked in a particularly vulgar manner, and he, supposing her to be a servant, called out in his rough way, "Hollo, my gal! I had nigh driven over you!"

Winny, therefore, turned very yellow on hearing that the delinquent was appointed to a better organ, and said sharply, "I never had a good opinion of Mr. Richard."

Regina was about to make a hot reply, and thus confirm for ever the idea of her partiality to Mr. Richard, when the door opened, and Mrs. Ward, followed by Mrs. Arnold, walked quietly in. "Oh! grandmama," thought Regina, "why could not you have loitered a little on the way?"

Mrs. Arnold addressed Winny; and Mrs. Ward, advancing slowly to Regina, sank into the easy-

chair beside her, and opened at once upon the subject of her morning's expedition.

"Well, we have been *so* successful," she began; "four such nice rooms, large casement windows, a stone staircase, and *such* a dairy! my dear child; but I learn that the farm was built out of the ruins of an old monastery, and the groined roof of the chapter-house now glooms above the milk-pans." Regina was in agonies; she well knew that Winny could hear with both ears at once, and that she was at that moment devoting one of those useful implements to Mrs. Arnold, while with the other she was gathering up the fragments of Mrs. Ward's description.

"Yes, it is a pleasant walk," she answered, "and the Dykeham woods are all round you; there is a bridle-path all along the hill-top, from which you have such a lovely view of the valley quite as far as Bradford."

"You shall shew it me some evening, when you and Mrs. Arnold walk over to taste my strawberries and cream."

Regina put her hand into Mrs. Ward's.

"The little high-born fingers!" said Mrs. Ward, caressing them with her own.

"Will you introduce me to your friend, Mrs. Arnold?" asked Miss Hopper in her very highest key.

At this piece of presumption, Regina's grey eyes flashed fire; a child could have told that, if an introduction had been wished, Mrs. Arnold would have done so unasked.

"Miss Hopper," said Mrs. Arnold, indicating Mrs. Ward by a movement of her hand, instead of mentioning her name.

Mrs. Ward, her beautiful lips trembling with suppressed laughter, bowed in return to Miss Hopper's salutation.

"I did not quite catch the name?" said Miss Hopper.

"If you will take some luncheon with us, I believe we shall find it ready in the dining-room," remarked Mrs. Arnold, rising.

Even Miss Hopper could not persist any longer; she declined the luncheon, and suffered Regina to conduct her down-stairs.

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. Ward spent a week with Mrs. Arnold while her lodgings were preparing. She furnished them herself, and she appeared to have ample means to gratify her taste. She hired a Dingleby girl to wait on her personally, all other offices being undertaken by the old-fashioned farmer's wife. Certain trunks had arrived to her address during the week, containing store of rich clothes, trinkets, books, and objects of *virtù*. Every thing she possessed gave the idea that she had been in affluent circumstances; even her dressing-case was splendidly fitted up, and the chased gold tops of the glass bottles within, bore the initials R. W., engraved beneath an ancient coat-of-arms. Regina, poor herald though she was, could tell that this was an old crest, from the

device being enclosed in a border, or *bordure*, to speak correctly, which is never seen in modern escutcheons. Had Regina been of a prying disposition, she would very soon have come to the bottom of whatever slight mystery might appertain to her friend's situation. For there was a fearless candour about Mrs. Ward, which frequently led her to say things that were any thing but prudent, considering that, by her own shewing, she was desirous of concealment. Thus she had no scruple in avowing to Regina that she made use of a feigned name.

"You see, I assumed the name of Ward," she remarked one day as they were standing before her toilet table, on which were displayed several costly trifles inscribed with her armorial bearings; "because of my initials, which are marked upon every thing I have. Fancy the washerwoman puzzling over my pocket-handkerchiefs, if I had called myself Mrs. Anderson."

Regina laughed, but she was far the more cautious of the two. Her friendship made her vigilant. She was always putting away Mrs.

Ward's books, and locking up her toilet bottles; and some very elegant trinkets which her friend had absolutely forced upon her, she put aside, resolving, with what in a young girl was a strong effort of self-denial, that she would not wear them, lest they should be seen by somebody who might be acquainted with Mrs. Ward's history, and willing to do her an injury.

"I believe you suspect Marianne of having graduated under the Garter King-at-Arms!" cried Mrs. Ward one morning, when Regina snatched up an antique casket that held her crochet, and prepared to run out of the room with it on hearing the bell ring.

"No!" said Regina, pointing to the brazen lock above which the ancient coat was engraved; "but, if Mr. Brand should come in, you might as well tell him your name at once. He is an excellent herald."

Mr. Brand did come in just as Regina vanished with the casket. He was a pleasant, good-natured, fat young man, with very small features, that scarcely made any shew on his portly expanse of

face. He was a great favourite with Mrs. Arnold; a little, perhaps, because he presented so strong a contrast to his principal, Mr. Morley; who, dark and gaunt, with a swinging pace, bore a strong analogy to a hungry wolf.

When Regina came back empty-handed, she found them all sitting round the table, laughing heartily at a number of *Punch* which was spread open before them.

"It's very good, *I* think," said Mr. Brand; "but it's not liked at the rectory, and therefore it's not often I get hold of one. Where do you think I picked up this?"

"At the Ramsays', I suppose!" exclaimed Regina, drawing near to look at the sketch of a tall, angular woman in a large bonnet, representing some political character. "Of course you did, though; for some one has written Miss Hopper's name at the bottom—one of the many Mr. Ramsays, most likely."

"Well," said Mr. Brand, turning round and looking up at Regina, "what will you say to my having found this in Miss Hopper's hands this

morning? It had been sent her by post; and as she was—well—was shedding tears over it, I thought the best thing I could do for her was to carry it away."

"And she said, did she not, that I sent it to her?" cried Regina.

"I assure you, Miss Howard," replied Mr. Brand, "that I never believed you capable of it."

"Thank you," said Regina; "it is a little hard that Miss Hopper cannot imagine me to be a gentlewoman, because she is not one herself."

"Regina, Regina!" exclaimed Mrs. Arnold.

"I know these female quarrels must appear very small and ridiculous to you," pursued Regina, making a little threatening face at her grandmama; "but I ask you, Mr. Brand, if I am not persecuted? Not an idle boy sends Winny Hopper a valentine but she accuses me. If Mr. Morley wants to see a martyr, let him come here!"

"Oh, Miss Howard!" said Mr. Brand, trying to look grave.

"I like your Mr. Brand," whispered Mrs. Ward.

"He did that very well; he saw at a glance, when you first looked at the print, that you had nothing to do with it, and that was all he came for; I'm rather sorry I shall not be his parishioner."

"So, Miss Howard, I hear that you are to make a brilliant debût at this concert," said Mr. Brand; "at least so I learn from Mr. Richard."

"I hope you will be there, Mr. Brand, to encourage me," laughed Regina.

"Certainly, I shall; is it thought proper to applaud the performances, Mrs. Arnold?"

"Oh no! it is conducted in the most discreet manner; and you, what progress do you make on the organ?"

"Not enough to perform a solo at your concert; but I can play a chant and half a psalm-tune. I am getting on, Mrs. Arnold, though Miss Howard is disposed to laugh at me."

"Indeed, Mr. Brand, I think you a very promising pupil!" exclaimed Regina.

"Well, Mr. Richard thinks he shall make something of me; and he is a good master, though an odd man."

"I hear he is not allowed at the rectory," said Regina. "They have Mr. Bradford Winter, with his airs and graces."

"What an odd name, Bradford!" remarked Mrs. Ward.

"Yes, he was born soon after they came to the town," said Mrs. Arnold; "but it *was* a strange fancy."

"A very nice man!" repeated Mrs. Ward, when Mr. Brand had taken leave; "whom is he to marry? You know the clergyman of a village is always going to marry somebody."

"Miss Hopper thinks he is going to marry her, if she cannot get Mr. Morley, that is to say!" exclaimed Regina; "but other people think he is to marry Miss Morley, the eldest girl, who is just out."

"Is she pretty?"

"Why, no."

"Rich, then?"

"Mr. Morley must be well off, but he has nine children."

"And is Mr. Brand often here?"

"Very often. He and grandmama are great allies."

"Then poor Miss Morley!"

"Why, Mrs. Ward? I am sure grandmama would never say a word against her."

"I am sure she would not!" said Mrs. Ward eagerly; "come, let us try a duet together, 'O lovely Peace!'—we both adore Handel."

It was the evening before Mrs. Ward left them for her home at Dykeham. It happened to be dull and windy; and there is something doleful in summer wind. It rained, too, in a drizzling chilly way. There was a fire lit in the drawing-room; Mrs. Arnold was taking her after-dinner sleep, Mrs. Ward was reclining in one of the comfortable chairs with which the room abounded, and Regina, seated on a stool at her side, was resting her head in her friend's lap, and watching the boughs of the great fir-tree, as they swayed to and fro before the window panes.

"I love the fir," said Regina; "I am never tired of watching its branches, as they toss and beckon in the wind."

"What conceit is that, pretty one?" asked Mrs. Ward.

"I don't know; when I read Racine to grandmama as a child, they used to keep time to the stately lines. It seemed that, while I read, they went through the gestures of the parts. I have seen Andromaque tossing her arms many times, when I have recited those scenes in the twilight to grandmama."

"How lonely I shall feel to-morrow evening!" said Mrs. Ward, stroking Regina's bright hair. "I shall be thinking of this cheerful room and its kind inmates, and I shall not know how to occupy myself at first. Afterwards, I am so used to solitude, that I shall not be at a loss."

"And we shall come to you, and see you here, so very often, I hope."

"Oh, yes! I count upon that."

"Mrs. Ward," said Regina after a pause, "is your little boy like you?"

Mrs. Ward, suppressing a strong inclination to laugh, replied—"Why, no! I really think not in the least like me."

"Oh, what a pity!" cried Regina.

"But I think nobody so handsome," said Mrs. Ward, laughing. "He is very tall (for his age), and very light; but, that he is so much better-looking, he resembles very much a relation of his, Lord Oswestry, whom you may have seen."

"Lord Oswestry! is he related to you?"

"To my son, at least—not to my family."

"And did I say, grandmama, that I felt as if there was something particular about the Oswestrys; something that interested me, I did not know why? and now it is explained!"

"Grandmama is asleep," said Mrs. Ward, smiling.

"Will your little boy be able to come and see you, Mrs. Ward?"

"Oh, yes! I quite depend on seeing him soon."

"I should think he would be very much amused at the farm, with the cattle, and horses, and the harvest that is soon coming on," said Regina.

"Yes—he is reasonably fond of horses," replied Mrs. Ward.

"And how old is he?"

"If I tell you his age," said Mrs. Ward, patting her cheek, "you would think me an old woman."

"Oh, that I could not!" exclaimed Regina, rising and going to the tea-table.

They walked with Mrs. Ward to Dykeham the next day, and yielded to her persuasions to stay and drink tea with her. A warm moonlight evening tempted Mrs. Arnold to linger till nine o'clock; but the walk through the fields was so retired and so short, that they had no fear of returning by themselves, even at that hour. Mrs. Ward was as pleased as a child with exploring the farm in company with Regina. The dairy was especially visited—then the stack-yard, the straw-yard, the barns, the cows, the pigeons. Then the well-stocked garden, enamelled with roses and sweet peas—the arbour, curtained with jessamine—the distant beehives, and the long range of dark beech woods crowning the hill behind—all gave an air of peace and seclusion to the spot.

"I could almost fancy being happy here," said Mrs. Ward to herself, as they stood at the gate looking out on the rich prospect.

"How I wish I could make you so!" exclaimed Regina.

"You do make me happier," replied Mrs. Ward; "I always feel soothed by your presence."

"And, when your little boy comes, you will be so much more cheerful," added Regina. "What delightful walks you will take in the wood! You will not be afraid of gipsies; for even a boy is a protection, you know. His holidays must soon be here now."

"Yes—I hope he will soon have a holiday," returned Mrs. Ward.

"Is he like you in nothing? is he not fond of music?" asked Regina.

"Oh, yes! passionately fond of music. I never met any one more so."

"You will sing to us before we go?"

"Yes, you shall judge of my new piano."

Mrs. Ward had a beautiful voice, and a far more finished manner than Regina could boast; but she always used to say to her—

"Your pure cathedral style is all in the right way, my dear. You have nothing to unlearn; and

a few lessons would give you the Italian manner (if it is worth having) at any time. But I warn you, that when it is not perfectly caught, it is worse than any thing—more like the noise of a sick cow than any human effort of the lungs. I shall see some of you to-morrow?" asked Mrs. Ward in her coaxing tone, as she parted with her two friends at the gate.

"It is Regina's Bradford day, and I am afraid of her doing any thing beyond her lesson; she is not strong, you know," said Mrs. Arnold. "But if you would take your tea with us——"

"With pleasure. I want to hear 'Angels ever bright and fair,' after the next lesson."

Every thing went well with Regina at the Winters'; her symphony was already perfect; the two songs intrusted to her were "*rendered* quite professionally," as Mr. Bradford Winter told her: at her particular request Mozart's *Et Incarnatus* was included in the programme, and the soprano fell to her share. Mrs. Ward praised and encouraged her, and was never tired of making her rehearse her songs, and teaching her to finish every passage.

They were going over the divine *Et Incarnatus* together that evening, when Mr. Brand came in "promiscuously," as Becky used to say; Mrs. Arnold begged him to take the tenor part, and they went through it very successfully. Mrs. Ward was an excellent musician, and she took up the points of the bass voice so distinctly, that the omission of the fourth part was scarcely felt.

"How I wish, Mr. Brand, you were to sing this on the 20th, instead of Mr. Bradford Winter; he has such a tiny voice; and you *are* a pupil, you know; why should you not?" cried Regina.

"No, I'm afraid, Miss Howard; it's a very flattering wish on your part; but it would not be liked at the rectory."

"Oh! if Miss Morley objects," laughed Regina.

"No, indeed, Miss Howard; you have quite a wrong idea; I was thinking only of Mr. Morley."

Mr. Brand looked so hot and earnest, that Mrs. Ward turned the subject. "Suppose we try the *Agnus Dei* from the Fourth Mass," she said, turning over the leaves.

"That is really exquisite," said Mrs. Arnold, as they concluded.

"And it must be fine to charm my Huguenot grandmama," exclaimed Regina. "I cannot think what makes me so fond of all Catholic things; certainly it is not a taste inherited from the Lavals, nor from my dear grandfather, Arnold: but *I* like the *genuine article*, Mr. Brand!"

"Oh, Miss Howard, you are too bad!" returned the curate; "but I hope Mrs. Arnold will persuade you not to turn Papist."

"I have no fear of that, Mr. Brand," said Mrs. Arnold; "she ventures to be very saucy sometimes, and I know you are good enough not to take offence; but, really, what are we to say to these great wax candles that Mr. Morley has set upon the communion table?"

Mrs. Arnold looked so anxious, that Mr. Brand felt obliged to say something; he seemed rather puzzled.

"Why, Mrs. Arnold, we may say—a—that—that they are a great expense to the parish."

Mrs. Ward laughed. "I dare say they look

very handsome, Mr. Brand; you should employ some of your ladies in painting those pretty emblems which you see affixed to the Catholic tapers: I would volunteer, but I belong to Dingleby, where tapers are not encouraged."

"If, instead of that, Mrs. Ward, you and Miss Howard will sing me a duet, I will not say that I shall not be more obliged to you."

Mrs. Ward and Regina readily complied; but Mr. Brand, with all his love of music, instead of approaching the piano, drew his chair close to Mrs. Arnold, and said in a low tone: "That is a very beautiful creature, and a lady of distinction, to judge by her manners."

"So I think," replied Mrs Arnold.

"I thought it better—I called this evening," said Mr. Brand with a good deal of hesitation—"it could do no harm to let you know, that Mr. Morley intends calling on you upon this very subject."

"You frighten me, Mr. Brand! What is his object?"

"He imagines there is some mystery connected with this lady, and he conceives (I do not defend

him) that your intimacy with her is objectionable, if you cannot explain who and what she is, and give a sufficient reason for her being here at Holmwood."

"What a fortunate circumstance that her lodgings are in Dingleby! I hope that will set his mind at rest; at least it will acquit me of any obligation to betray her confidence, if I possess it; but really, Mr. Brand, this is a little inquisitorial—is it not? Nobody used to the world can look at that lady, and not be convinced that she is respectable; and, beyond that, what right has any one to investigate?"

"I do not advocate it, I assure you, Mrs. Arnold. I merely wished you to be prepared for his visit."

"And I feel your kindness very much, Mr. Brand: by the way, perhaps, you will mention that I give my soup on Thursday. In little things I should always wish to comply with his demands, though I could desire that they were not conveyed through the medium of Miss Hopper; but really this invasion of one's house and hearth—my Huguenot blood begins to rebel!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Ward, while she was playing the symphony, "I do believe it is coming—the proposal is coming! I don't know whether you are used to the sort of thing; but at any rate you can make up your mind while I am getting through this little bit of solo. Make haste! I am going to begin.!"

"Don't, Mrs. Ward; you set me laughing!"

"There you lost your time, silly child! To be sure it is nervous—these things don't happen every day."

"I think, ladies, you are merrier than we have been," said Mr. Brand, approaching them.

"How's that, Mr. Brand?" asked Mrs. Ward, turning from the piano.

"I am never merry when I hear sweet music," he replied.

"Mr. Brand, I hope you don't forget to-morrow?" cried Regina.

"What to-morrow, Miss Howard?" he asked half laughing, yet looking as if he perfectly expected an attack.

"The eve of St. Ildefonso! Dear me, what

would become of you, if I did not remind you of your duties?"

Mr. Brand laughed heartily, and made his adieu to the party.

"He is so good-tempered," remarked Mrs. Arnold.

"I am quite in love with him," said Mrs. Ward.

Regina was shutting up the piano.

"My namesake says nothing!" added Mrs. Ward.

"Oh, yes! I am charmed with him, of course," cried Regina, closing the instrument carefully.

"And, my dear madam," asked Mrs. Ward, affecting to whisper, "what does he propose to settle on our little friend? something handsome, I trust."

"My dear Mrs. Ward, that child!" returned Mrs. Arnold, laughing.

"We are never children in these days; we begin to think about pin-money at five years old," replied Mrs. Ward.

"My opinion," said Regina, "is, that though somebody is very witty and very gay, she is like-

wise very tired, and ought not to sit up any longer."

"The child is right" returned Mrs. Ward; "pleasure fatigues me, pain exhausts me, but my spirits run away with me sometimes. My spirits! I do believe there are some things you cannot destroy!"

"Oh, grandmama!" cried Regina, as she was putting on her friend's shawl, "I do believe I saw the miser on the common, as I was returning from Bradford with Becky—such a thin grey old man! He followed us close for a long way: once I thought he seemed listening to what we were saying."

"Who is the miser?" asked Mrs. Ward, sitting down again.

"An old man, supposed to live in that house on the common; they say his name his Baker."

"Baker!" repeated Mrs. Ward, and she sat thinking for some moments.

"What can she know about Bakers?" thought Regina; "it is such a common name—first Dods, and then Baker!"

"Is he a gentleman, your miser?" she asked, after a pause.

"He is a very shabby, poor-looking old man," said Regina; "but when people are old I think they are seldom vulgar—white hairs ennoble."

"She is odd, Mrs. Arnold," exclaimed Mrs. Ward, rising. "Well, Regina, I expect my little boy from day to day; you must help me to amuse him."

"That I will!" she cried; "but I know so few games, having no brothers, and though there are some ninepins in the summer-house, half of them are lost."

"What a pity!" returned Mrs. Ward. "Good-night, dear Mrs. Arnold."

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Morley did not fail to pay his promised visit on the morrow. Regina took care to be in the drawing-room, while her grandmama received him below.

"I know I shall be pert, granny, if he is insolent," she said; "you would rather, would you not, that I kept out of harm's way."

"Much rather, my little Regina," said the old lady, taking out her knitting.

She looked so delicate and pretty in the cool shady room—so like a picture, with her ever fresh cambric frills, and her long rich black silk gown—that a man less spiritual-minded might have felt the charm of her gracious presence, and lowered his voice accordingly.

He came in, however, gaunt as usual, his black

hair in disorder, his teeth projecting, his surly eyes set close together, and a drop in one eyelid, which is ever to be shunned.

"Be seated, Mr. Morley," said the old lady half rising, the coy perfume of violets diffusing itself from every fold of her spotless dress as she moved.

"Oh! I called to inquire about the lady you have with you," said Mr. Morley, laying his hat on the ground before him.

"That lady is no longer in my house; she has taken lodgings in the parish of Dingleby," replied Mrs. Arnold.

"In that case, and if your acquaintance with her *has* wholly ceased——"

"Far from it, Mr. Morley; I am just beginning to know her."

"Well—who and what is she?"

"I scarcely know how to answer your unusual questions," returned the old lady mildly; but the beautiful rouge-spot deepened upon either cheek.

"What's her name, ma'am?"

"Ward."

"You *know* that to be her name?"

"That is the name by which she is known to me."

"Brand says she is a woman of quality."

"She seemed to strike Mr. Brand as such; but I need not remind Mr. Morley that in England, where the birth is gentle, a title does not add any thing but precedence to the estimation in which a lady is held."

Mr. Morley never thought any remark a woman made worth a direct answer; he went on with his cross (very cross) examination.

"Well, but what is she? is she a widow?"

"I never took the liberty of asking her that question."

"Because you must be aware that is an important point to ascertain. If she is *not* a widow, what business has she away from her husband?"

"I can imagine many causes that might justify such a step," replied Mrs. Arnold gently; "but I have not seen it my duty to pry into her concerns."

"It *is* your duty, *then*, Mrs. Arnold! Here is your grand-daughter associating with you don't know who! a young person, I must add, the

last in the world to be allowed to run loose with any chance acquaintance."

"Mr. Morley, I am as solicitous for my grandchild's welfare as you can be; but all our ideas of duty seem to me so opposite, that I think they will be only strengthened on either side by discussion."

"*Your* ideas, ma'am? What can they possibly be when compared with *mine?* Am not I a priest?"

Mrs. Arnold might have replied, had she spoken her thoughts, "By no manner of means. No sacrifice, no priest!" But she merely answered with that "*fin sourire*" for which we have no equivalent term—"If, Mr. Morley, the clergy are infallible, I claim that right for your predecessor. Mr. Arnold gave me almost all the ideas I possess."

No doubt Mr. Morley had a crushing argument in reserve, if he had chosen to employ it; but as he adhered to his rule of neglecting all her replies, leaving them quite out of the conversation, as it were, he went on improving his hearer to this effect.

"Well, ma'am, I take leave to tell you that all this looks very suspicious. Here's a woman, who

does not proclaim herself a widow, living without her husband; no possible treatment can justify her escaping from his control——"

"How if he attempted her life, Mr. Morley?" asked Mrs. Arnold, meekly.

"That would have nothing to do with it. Besides, what do you call attempting her life? How do you know he attempted it? As long as she is not dead, it is a proof, I suppose, that she is living."

Mrs. Arnold did not deny it.

"And I must tell you that a lady of great good sense, Miss Hopper, who met her here, mentioned her to me as a very flighty sort of person."

Again the spiritual smile. Unfortunately his authority was not a weighty one in that house.

"And, in connection with that subject," he added (taking up his hat, to Mrs. Arnold's great refreshment), "let me advise you to caution Miss Howard to spread no more reports of my matrimonial views. It is not pleasing to me that any thing connected with my affairs should be the subject of discussion."

"I must venture to say, in defence of my granddaughter," remarked Mrs. Arnold, "that if she confided any current report to a lady of Miss Hopper's sense and discretion, it was the farthest from her thought that it would be carried round to the only person it was likely to annoy."

The irony of the defence escaped him, but not the boldness of making any defence at all. He rose with a sullen nod, meant to acknowledge Mrs. Arnold's graceful courtesy, and stalked out of the room.

"Oh, my little Regina! what have you been doing?" cried Mrs. Arnold, when her grandchild, swift and light as a bird, darted into the room, which Mr. Morley had just lightened of his presence; "what is this report you have spread about our rector?"

"Why, granny, I merely told Winny a piece of Bradford gossip about him and Miss Cutler, to divert her from her kind inquiries after Mrs. Ward, and here she has carried it straight to Mr. Morley! Delicate! I suppose you can see now what a well-wisher she is to both of us!"

"She cannot wish, my dear, to injure us; we have never done her any thing but good."

"*You* have not, granny! But even Winny must see that *I* despise her, and that is not to be forgiven."

"Miss Hopper is not judicious," began Mrs. Arnold.

"Now, granny, I think her the most judicious woman that ever lived. She is a female vicar of Bray; she knows how to get good things from every body, though how she manages to secure Mr. Morley's patronage, and Mr. Miller's favour, at the same time, is a mystery to me; I'll ask her some day for the receipt."

"My little Regina will do nothing that she knows will vex her grandmama. Is the fly come already? I have so much shopping to do at Bradford that you will not see me here much before one o'clock, but you will be so engrossed with your music that you will not miss me."

"My love to Mr. and Mrs. Winter, granny," said Regina, as she attended Mrs. Arnold to the door of the fly; "and don't forget my compliments

to Mr. Richard; I quite doat on him ever since——"

This singular declaration was cut short by the approach of Winny herself, picking her way along the path, just wetted by a summer shower, and working her eyes from side to side, while her head remained perfectly straight.

Mrs. Arnold shook her head at Regina from the window, and the fly drove off.

"Grandmama going to Bradford, Regina?" squeaked Winny.

"*Gone*, Miss Hopper," said Regina with a formal bow.

"Mr. Morley has been here this morning?"

"Yes, *thank you*, Miss Hopper." Giving "thank you" all the emphasis of "thanks *to* you."

"Seen Mrs. Ward lately?" (her voice mounting at every question, till it seemed impossible that she could squeak more sharply.)

"We have seen her every day since she came, and we fully intend and hope to continue that pleasure."

"Very handsome woman."

"So I think."

"Who is she, Regina?"

"Mrs. Ward, of the parish of Dingleby, in the county of Buckinghamshire."

And, Regina's irritation having now reached its height, she saluted Miss Hopper hastily, lest worse should come, and ran into the house.

Miss Hopper proceeded leisurely on her way; for she was thinking whether she should first tell Mr. Morley, or Mr. Brand, that she had heard Regina say she doated on Mr. Richard.

In another minute the lovely notes of Schubert's "Horch horch die Lerch" rang through the room.

Becky—plain creature though she was—loved Regina's singing; and having laid the luncheon ready for Marianne, and prepared the chicken and the gooseberry tart for dinner, she deemed herself at liberty to seat herself on the four little steps which led from the landing to the drawing-room door, and, as she phrased it, to "have a bit of music."

While she was thus enjoying herself, with her arms rolled up in her apron, Marianne approached,

and in a cautious whisper informed her that there was a gentleman wished to speak to Miss Regina.

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Becky, looking very pugnacious; "what gentleman? And missis out! I dare say it is somebody come after the plate."

"No, it's not!" persisted Marianne, forcing her way to the drawing-room door—"Miss 'Jina, a gentleman down-stairs particularly wishes to speak to you for a moment."

"Beg him to walk up," said Regina, discontentedly leaving the piano, and running over in her mind the very few gentlemen with whom she was on speaking terms.

"Surely it's not Mr. Morley come back again?" she thought, as she took her seat. "No, hardly; and Mr. Brand was here last night—and the Ramsays are in town—and the Chillingworths don't know me to speak to—and young Miller is in Africa, and very foolish I think in his father to let him go—the miser, perhaps——"

But the tall grave young man who now stood in the doorway, was of a very different class from the generality of the Holmwood beaux. He had

that air which later in life she learned to define as belonging exclusively to persons of condition, whose habits and acquirements did not disgrace their birth; but she was now only sensible of something reserved and calm, that threw her to a distance, and made her feel almost for the first time in her life thoroughly shy.

"I must apologise for disturbing you, Miss Arnold," he said; "but I understand it is through you that I am to be made acquainted with Mrs. Ward's place of residence. As Mrs. Arnold is from home, perhaps you will have the goodness to direct me to her house."

"If you would not mind waiting till grandmama returns," said Regina hesitating; "she is only gone into Bradford, a little way off, for shopping; she will be happy to speak to you; Mrs. Ward, I know, does not wish to receive strangers."

"But Mrs. Ward, I am sure, is very anxious to see me," replied the stranger; "I am her son."

Regina's transparent features expressed the most perfect incredulity at this statement. She looked up at the tall gentleman, who stood with such a

polite and frigid air before her. Although his broad forehead and accentuated features might make him look older than he was—yet to suppose him Mrs. Ward's son was too ridiculous. No! this was one of her enemies come in disguise to seek her out. She coloured, half frightened, and pointed to a chair—

"If you would have the goodness to sit down for a little while," she said; "I expect grandmama in every minute—at the latest, she will return by one o'clock."

He took the chair with a slight inclination of his head, and there was silence for a minute.

"I am impatient to see Mrs. Ward," he began presently; "if you would give me an idea where her house stands, I am sure I should be able to make it out. You can imagine that I should be glad to avoid making any inquiries in the neighbourhood that might draw attention to Mrs. Ward's retreat."

"It is very clear to me," thought Regina, "that here is a treacherous plot, which it is my business to counteract."

"I am so sorry to delay you," she replied, growing quite nervous; "but grandmama would like, I am sure, to see you first. Mrs. Ward's health is so very delicate."

"My God!" he exclaimed, starting from his chair, "is she worse than when she wrote?"

"No; but she is far from strong, and the exertion of receiving a stranger——"

"Why, I believe you take me for an impostor," he replied. "If you know my mother's handwriting, I may be able to convince you of my identity. Here is the very letter that summoned me hither."

And, drawing out an envelope, he rose and extended it towards her. She recognised the very letter which she had herself carried into the hall on the first morning of Mrs. Ward's visit. There was the direction which had so astonished her, "To John Dods, Post-Office, Glascow"—the very formation of the D which had then struck her as singular. The colour rushed over her face.

"I am sure I beg your pardon," she cried; "I will shew you the way in a minute; in five minutes

you may reach the farm, if you go through the fields. I really did not believe you were Mr. Ward."

He drew back his head a little, as if he winced at the name. She took her bonnet and scarf from the couch, and led the way out of the room—taking the latch-key from behind the glass door, as she stepped into the garden.

No conversation passed as they went through the flower-garden into the orchard, thence into a paddock, where Mrs. Arnold's two cows were grazing, and then, crossing the road, entered the Dingleby fields. She unlatched the gates, and he paused and closed them after her in silence. She glanced towards him sometimes, and saw that he was very fair and pale, carried his head proudly, and had a calm chilling expression in his blue eyes—not at all like his mother, certainly.

At last he said—"I am sorry to bring you through the wet grass, Miss Arnold."

Regina longed to tell him her name was Howard; but she thought, after all, it did not signify. "There is a pathway," she returned; "and it has rained very little."

"I suppose that, living in the country, you are indifferent to weather."

"No; we country-folks are quite as fond of ourselves as any town's-people can be. We are very much afraid of the wet."

He smiled for an instant, and there was another silence.

They came to a stile. Regina mounted neatly to the top, and then sprang lightly to the ground, just touching his offered hand.

"You will hurt yourself some day if you jump down from that height," he remarked coolly, after directing a quick piercing glance at her slender feet.

She laughed, and shook her head; and they spoke no more till they came to the five-barred gate that closed the field next to Dykeham farmyard.

"That is the house; and, if you go through the stack-yard, you will come to the great door," said Regina. "And I hope, I'm sure, that I have made no blunder in bringing you," she added to herself.

He took off his hat and thanked her; and she

sped home through the fields to meet her grandmama.

"It is all very odd, my dear," said Mrs. Arnold, who had just returned; "but we shall be sure to see Mrs. Ward to-day or to-morrow, and then no doubt she will explain the mystery."

"You will take a little turn on the common, won't you, granny?" asked Regina, after dinner; "it is such a lovely evening."

"Yes, we shall have time for a nice walk before the dew falls. What a beautiful scene it is, my Regina! what noble trees, what rich fern, what picturesque underwood! It is as if we possessed a magnificent park, without the burden of a great fortune."

"Indeed, granny, I don't think it is the same at all; if we had this fine park, suppose, how very different we should find the neighbours. Mrs. Chillingworth would then ask me to her archery fêtes."

"Yes, because you would ask her to yours—that is all fair, my Regina."

"And Winny! oh! how sweet we should be-

come! She would go about praising us, and saying, "you know how I always loved dear Mrs. Arnold and dear Regina!"

"But, my dear, you should not squeak," said the old lady, turning away her head, that Regina might not see her smile.

"And so I wish I *had* a park and a great fortune," added Regina.

"That is not a possible wish, my love, unless indeed you should marry a rich man."

"And that is not likely, is it granny?" laughed Regina; "but I am sure there is Mrs. Ward, and the gentleman who says he is her son, coming towards us across the common."

"My dear Mrs. Arnold, my son, Alban, is very anxious to make your acquaintance, and to thank you for all your kindness to his mother," said Mrs. Ward as they met; then, turning her laughing eyes upon Regina, she added, "You have seen my little boy before, I need not introduce you."

"I am sorry, Miss Arnold, to have caused you some perplexity this morning," he said, turning from Mrs. Arnold, to whom he was expressing

his sense of her goodness; "but you know where to lay the blame."

He glanced towards his mother; and continued speaking to Mrs. Arnold.

"Now, I appeal to you, Regina, whether I ever said he was a little boy. Was it not quite your own idea?"

Regina, colouring painfully, tried to shrink out of notice.

"Was it not you who always insisted on his being so little?" pursued Mrs. Ward, laughing heartily.

"You let me think so, Mrs. Ward; and even now I can hardly believe my eyes," said Regina, forced at last to speak.

"And yet, my dear, he is two-and-twenty, and a lieutenant in the —— regiment of infantry. John Dods, you know, his servant, receives my letters for his master. They are at Glascow now."

"You look so very young, Mrs. Ward."

"Alban," said Mrs. Ward, as the party was all walking on a level, "Miss Howard thinks you

will be so much amused in the stack-yard, watching the men thatching the new ricks—and then the pigs and the ducks!"

Mrs. Arnold was laughing gaily at the joke; Alban just smiled for half a minute; as to Regina, she was feeling wretched. And when her grandmama begged them to stay and drink tea, as her house was in their road home, she could hardly forbear making her a sign not to proceed with her invitation.

"Oh! about the ninepins!" exclaimed Mrs. Ward, as they entered the garden—"Have you found any more?—There might be enough now to play with—shall we ask him?"

"Oh! Mrs. Ward, if you would not; you make me so miserable."

"Poor little victim! But oh, Regina! I was so overjoyed to see him. If you knew what he has been to me in all my troubles; and yet you see I cannot help laughing. But he never jests."

"I should think not," answered Regina, looking at his reserved countenance.

She could not help admitting that the passing

smile which lighted up his features for an instant was very attractive, but she never saw any expression so brief; it was gone almost before you could mark it.

"It will never do to attack him as I do Mr. Brand," she thought. "I must mind what I am about here; and really it is difficult, I have got into such a habit of speaking my thoughts."

In order that she might not say any thing rude, she said nothing at all, and prepared the tea in a grave silence, which rather diverted Mrs. Ward.

"Regina is thinking of her promise," she said.

"What promise, Mrs. Ward?"

"You promised to help me to amuse my little boy; and I see, by your look, that you think it a hopeless case; you give it up, don't you?"

"I do think you teaze Miss Howard unmercifully," said Alban, turning round.

Regina looked grateful.

"And yet, for all that, Regina will do something for me that she would not for you—she will sing me a song!" cried Mrs. Ward.

Regina was really glad to go to the piano—she hoped the music would stop Mrs. Ward's reminiscences; and she either played herself, or urged her friend to play, until it was time for her to go home.

CHAPTER VII.

Two or three days' rain gave Regina time to recover from her astonishment; but, during that period, she and Mrs. Ward were equally kept prisoners by the weather, and saw nothing of each other. At last she was obliged to venture to Dykeham on an errand of charity. An old sick servant of Mrs. Arnold's had begged Regina to call upon her; but, though her way lay past the very door of the farm, she had not intended going in, had not Mrs. Ward, who was standing in the porch watching the weather, detected her at the entrance of the lane, struggling along through a quick heavy shower, and sent her son to meet her, and insist on her taking shelter.

"My mother complains, Miss Arnold, that you

have deserted her," said Alban, as they entered the porch.

"It is true; while you are here Mrs. Ward can want nobody else," answered Regina, shutting up her wet umbrella.

"Dear child—so it is only a storm of rain that will drive you into Dykeham!" exclaimed Mrs. Ward, as she came to lead her in.

"Oh, Mrs. Ward! you know I am only too glad to come, when you are alone."

"You are not afraid of Alban?"

"But I think you will prize my society so much more highly when Mr. Ward is not with you."

"You have been away quite long enough for me to wish you back again," said Mrs. Ward.

"I'm so glad!" exclaimed Regina frankly, taking Mrs. Ward's hand.

"And our duets?" inquired Mrs. Ward. "But I suppose you have not even vouchsafed a look at our grand affair from *Jessonda*, you have been so busy practising for your great concert."

"What concert?" asked Alban, who was now writing a letter at the other end of the room.

"Mr. Winter's concert at Bradford, at which Miss Howard is to appear as prima donna," replied Mrs. Ward.

"No—you are joking!" he exclaimed, coming up to the table.

"It is true—is it not, Regina?" repeated Mrs. Ward.

"True, except that I am not to be prima donna," said Regina.

"Not to sing at all, I suppose," remarked Alban.

"Really, Alban, you are very rude this morning," cried Mrs. Ward; "of course Miss Howard is to sing, and to be very much admired."

"You don't mean it?" he said, turning with a puzzled air to Regina.

"Yes! but I think you don't understand. It is not a public concert, where money is paid. Only a kind of soirée Mr. Winter gives, at which the pupils perform and their friends form the audience; all the best people in the neighbourhood do it."

"What—let their daughters play to edify all the butchers and bakers who may chance to have their children taught by Mr. Winter!"

"My dear Alban, you are so very far from polite this morning," began Mrs. Ward, uneasy at seeing the colour deepen on Regina's beautiful cheek.

"I beg pardon, I thought you were only laughing," he said coldly, and went back to his writing.

"Miss Field's father *is* a butterman," said Regina, as if thinking aloud.

"My dear, don't mind him; if you knew what a proud wretch he is, you would not be surprised at any thing he might say. I hope you will forget his impertinent remarks, and sing your very best."

"For the gratification of the butterman——" put in Alban, as he was folding his letter.

"I'm quite ashamed of him, my dear; those asides are not meant to be heard. Come, and let me hear this new gem by Schubert—it gains upon me; but, though a delicious bit of harmony, it will never put me out of conceit of our own charming glee—and the song was meant for several voices, you know."

"But I must be going now, Mrs. Ward," said Regina; "yes, although it rains still. Granny will be looking and wondering; and, if I remained, it

would not be to sing Schubert's 'Hark the lark!' I would rather Mr. Ward did not hear my rehearsal for the butchers' and bakers' concert."

"Don't let that influence you, Miss Arnold," remarked Alban, rising and coming down the room; "you will not disturb me in the least."

"You know my name is not Arnold," exclaimed Regina, pausing as she was about to leave the room.

"And you know my name is not Ward," he retorted.

"Yes, I know what it is *not*—but I cannot boast of knowing what it *is*," cried Regina; "you have the advantage of me there, if you chose to make use of your knowledge."

"Come, Alban, you must own yourself defeated," said Mrs. Ward, laughing.

He turned and bowed to Regina, rather condescendingly she thought; almost as if he considered her a little girl.

"And then, my little Regina," continued Mrs. Ward coaxingly, "(I do so love to hear Mrs. Arnold say 'my little Regina' in her little silver

voice,) you will tell your grandmama that I long so much to see her; and, as she is younger and stronger than I am, I should be so grateful if she would bring you to drink tea with me this evening; I know it will be a brilliant night after all the rain, (though I feel I am asking a very unconscionable thing.)"

"I think you are," said Alban; "what on earth can you offer Mrs. Arnold, to induce her to wade through these lanes at ten o'clock at night?"

"But she *will* come, Mrs. Ward, I know," exclaimed Regina, indignantly; "she will have the fly. *She* can value your society, and think it is worth coming to Dykeham if it was only to look at your beautiful face."

And then she stopped all at once; very red, and very shy.

"I like her in a passion!" said Mrs. Ward, gazing fondly at her.

They were in the porch, and the rain came through the little side window.

"You had better go in," said Alban, addressing his mother; "you are getting wet through, and

will have one of your chest attacks if you do not take care."

"Oh! dear Mrs. Ward, be careful!" cried Regina; "but (observing that Alban had put on his hat, and was opening her umbrella) what is Mr. Ward going to do?"

"Mr. Ward is going to see Miss Arnold home," replied Alban, gently closing the door upon his mother, and offering Regina his arm.

"Good gracious, you must not! I won't hear of such a thing! coming out in the wet for nothing! Mrs. Ward, do, pray, tell your son to go back into the house."

"I hope, my dear," said Mrs. Ward, who had gone round to the window, and was looking out at them with much pleasure, "that he means to make amends for his rudeness; and he is right. He can protect you much better than you can yourself; you will have enough to do to keep your pretty pink muslin out of the wet."

"Oh! but, dear Mrs. Ward, it will never do; only think if we were to meet Miss Hopper."

"I hope you may, my love; I want Alban to see

her so much, and to hear her; it's nothing without the voice. Mind you stop and speak to her, Regina!"

As Alban was standing in the rain, holding her umbrella over her, with a calm and evident determination of going with her, Regina thought it best to set off as quickly as possible. She waved her hand to Mrs. Ward, and started.

"I see, thoroughly unprepared for wet, those little shoes will be soaked through in a minute," said Alban coolly, when they were in the lane.

"And then I shall change them," said Regina.

"When the mischief is done," he replied.

"If women wear clumsy shoes, people are disgusted," pleaded Regina; "and if they are too thin, we are accused of vanity or folly."

"Well, you have rather a hard life of it," he returned.

Regina thought of his mother; perhaps he was thinking of her too, for there was a long silence.

At last he said gently, "Well, and what are you going to sing at this concert?"

"I don't wish to talk of the concert," answered Regina.

"I really hope you will forgive what I said about it," he urged. "I have no doubt it is all right; indeed it must be right, since Mrs. Arnold permits you to appear."

"Mrs. Ward said that you were very proud," exclaimed Regina, who had not yet cured herself of saying whatever came into her head.

"Of course I am," he returned coolly; "every one is who has any thing to be proud of, and the others are vain, that is the difference."

"I don't think I am proud," said Regina; "but then I am not rich."

"Well, where is this Miss Hopper to be seen?" he asked presently.

"I'm sorry to say she is very often to be seen where I am," laughed Regina; "I don't know what kind of sympathy it is that always leads us to go out at the same time, and to meet on the high-road! There! do you see a person just come out of that cottage?"

"A tall woman, skipping about on a pair of clogs?"

"Yes, holding an umbrella in one hand, and swinging a little basket in the other; with a foxy cloak and a very short cotton frock."

"And that is the famous Miss Hopper! Is she coming our way? That's all right."

"Regina could not help smiling at her companion, who seemed to think that Miss Hopper had come out for his special amusement, and certainly she had never appeared to more advantage; she struck out right and left among the puddles, her clogs clinking at every step, and tossed her little basket about with an airy gaiety, like a child skipping home from school."

Winny had her likes as well as her dislikes. If she disliked Regina very much indeed, she liked with equal zeal a fine tall young man. She gave Regina every facility for meeting her, and opened the conversation by her usual shrill question, "Grandmama quite well to-day, Regina?"

"Yes, thank you, Miss Hopper; I hope Mrs. Hopper's lameness is better."

"Thank you, dear mama's lameness is a little fanciful—nervousness, I believe. I don't encourage her to think at all about it."

Regina raised her brows; Alban found it advisable to use his handkerchief; Miss Hopper continued, "And Mrs. Ward, is her little boy come yet?"

The umbrella over Regina's head trembled a good deal. Regina cried out, all astonishment—

"Dear me, Miss Hopper, who ever told you any thing about Mrs. Ward's little boy?"

"Ah! ah! Regina," cried Winny, squeezing up her eyes, which had hitherto been doing duty upon Alban, "a little bird told me—I sha'n't say who! Good-morning! wet day!"

"Surely," said Regina, as they turned away, "she must listen at the hall door, or under our windows—how *could* she have heard Mrs. Ward that evening?"

"I think I'll sketch her," remarked Alban; "if you have many such originals, Holmwood must be an amusing place."

Mrs. Arnold readily agreed to take the fly to Dykeham farm that evening, and the weather turned out as Mrs. Ward had predicted—bright and warm, with that perfumed freshness that always follows summer rain. Mrs. Ward's rooms had acquired that home aspect which lodgings seldom put on; her piano strewn with music, her stand of flowers, her small easel for water-colours, gave an air of elegance to the apartment that the good farmer's wife had never dreamed of. She made a charming hostess; there was no effort, no attempt to amuse her guests, but there was a lightness, a gaiety, a grace in her manner, which kept them constantly excited and pleased. There was a little bright fire on the hearth for Mrs. Arnold, and a very easy-chair drawn close to it; and Regina could not but allow that Alban showed to great advantage by the courtesy and deference of his manner to her grandmama.

"Oh, Mrs. Ward! you have been sketching the pool in the meadows under the ash-trees," cried Regina going up to the easel; "where we went one hot day while you were staying with us; and

we drank some of the cold water out of a mug that one of the haymakers had left standing in the brook; when did you find time to do this?"

"One idle day," said Mrs. Ward, turning it carelessly over. "How do you like this face?"

"Oh, dear, Mrs. Ward! how pretty! I did not know you painted heads."

"Ask Mrs. Arnold what she thinks of it?"

A suspicion flashed all at once into Regina's mind, it was herself! That clear fine outline, that slender throat, and long plait circling the small head. She stopped short, colouring, and looked into Mrs. Ward's laughing face—

"Alban, shew it to Mrs. Arnold—my only attempt at portrait painting: my little friend here is seized with a modest fit."

"Oh, dear me! it is very like; it is my little Regina!" said the old lady. "I think, Mrs. Ward, I shall beg it of you."

"My dear madam, I am flattered beyond expression: just let me put a few touches to the background, and the sketch is yours. So you

think it pretty, Regina—you little conceited creature!"

Regina was covered with blushes, and she knew that Alban's calm eyes were fixed upon her:—if he would but have looked into the fire, or out of the window, or at her grandmama. She tried to shelter herself behind the urn, and asked Mrs. Ward to let her make the tea.

"My dear, I shall be truly grateful; no one detests more cordially than myself that sweet domestic occupation. Alban, we have not heard your opinion; can't you say something nice on the occasion?"

"On the picture, or the original?"

"Regina, I hope you will punish him for that by not singing. No! that would punish *me*; we must sing to night. I hope you will look very black at him."

"I am, Mrs. Ward. I am not looking at all like my picture."

"Oh, she has a spirit! Now, Regina, old as it is, and despised very likely by the gentleman who is going, I observe, to play at chess with Mrs.

Arnold, I am determined that we will sing, this dewy moonshiny night, 'I know a bank.'"

Whether he despised it or not, he lost his game very fast to the silvery strain: Mrs. Arnold took knights and pawns and bishops in the most reckless manner.

The piano stood facing one of the large casement windows, open on account of the heat, with the blind drawn down inside. They were almost at the last bar, when Regina, standing behind Mrs. Ward, who played the accompaniment, and looking straight before her, saw the blind move forward, as if impelled by a hand from without; saw, and heard the sharp rustle of the brown holland as it fell back into its place, and a thin shadowy face looked in for such a brief instant that she could not tell if fancy had supplied the vision. She caught her friend by the arm.

"Oh, Mrs. Ward!—a hand!—a face!—that window!"

Mrs. Ward sprang up with a shriek that rang in her ears long afterwards, and rushed to her son.

"Oh! Alban, help!—it is he!—help! help! there—the window!"

Alban, holding his mother in his arms, looked quietly at the blind which hung perfectly still, and then at Regina, who had come up to Mrs. Ward's side, brave but trembling.

"It is my fault; but I did see a hand plainly—that is, the impression of the fingers on the other side," she said.

"You have nothing to fear," he said gently to his mother. "It is my belief, as I told you, that he is gone abroad."

"He might have tracked me; there is still something left—much for a desperate man! Are you sure, Regina—what face—what sort of face?"

"It was such a glance; I could not trust in my eyesight, only I should have said, something very ghostly: not unlike," she added, collecting her ideas, "not much unlike the face of the miser."

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Ward, sitting down, "my dear Mrs. Arnold, what can I say, how apologise? We have been two simpletons, who have let our fears get the better of us. But yet, Alban, if you

did not mind looking out of the window, it would be a satisfaction to me to hear that there is no one outside."

"Yes! I think I can screw up my courage to that point," he said, smiling. "I will even go out, if it will be any pleasure to you, and search round the haystacks. The garden is very pretty and calm in the moonlight (look at it Miss Howard), but I see no fairies."

Regina advanced cautiously, and looked from the casement.

"You are sure?" he asked in a low voice.

"Quite sure, as far as the hand goes; the face might have been my fancy."

"At any rate, we may suppose," he added, smiling, "that there was a face in connection with the hand."

"I don't know," said Regina, thoughtfully.

"Alban, I won't have you go out!" cried Mrs. Ward, who was sitting close by Mrs. Arnold.

"I am at your orders," he replied, closing the window and coming up to the fireplace.

"Well, now, we have all been very much shaken,

suppose we have some elder wine," said Mrs. Ward, after a pause.

"In the middle of June?" added her son.

"Fear makes me cold, Regina," said Mrs. Ward.

"And me—feel my hands," cried Regina.

"I am not altogether warm," remarked Mrs. Arnold.

"Ha! ha! we are all agreed!" exclaimed Mrs. Ward, ringing the bell. "Mrs. King, a tray of hot wine, with strips of toast; we are playing at Christmas!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Now it happened that, on the morning when they met Miss Hopper, that moral lady had just danced out of a cottage, where she had been trying to convince a burly navigator that the church objected to the very large block of bacon on which he was about to make his early lunch; the day being Friday. She had held up before this unconscious Catholic-Protestant, or Protestant-Catholic, the shining example of Mr. Morley, who was, she knew, that very day going to dine with his whole family off a remarkably fine turbot. The navigator continued to ply his clasp-knife in the most reckless manner during this statement; but his wife coming forward civilly, with a child on each arm, stated, that though Jim's wages was uncommon high just now owing to the tunnel, yet

that fish was dearer than meat, and didn't go so far, and she made bold to think that fasting was not meant for poor people.

Jim, whose mind was still more perplexed on this subject than his wife's, was here heard to murmur, that, if the lady was so partial to fish, perhaps she would stand a red herring or so for tea; and he did not care if he *did* eat that for a relish. And then Winny, after trying to explain the nature of fasting, was induced to extract from her own pocket (a rare occurrence) the sum of fourpence, to be laid out in Emden grits for the family meal on that day week. The poor woman gladly accepted the grits, having on hand a voracious pair of babies, who devoured a good deal more than their natural food, including strips of warm bacon from father's plate, and who would be very well contented to fast on good gruel all the week round.

It was no wonder, then, that she skipped forth in a state of great exultation after this good deed, and that her pious feelings received an unpleasant check at the sight of Alban attending upon Regina.

It appeared quite necessary to the upward flight of Miss Hopper's feelings, that she should be clearly informed of every thing connected with Mrs. Ward. She knew, by hook or by crook, every thing else that went on in the parish; and a mystery made her angry. And when Winny was angry, she had an awkward habit of contriving to say or do some choice little bit of mischief against the offender. So that, meeting Mr. Morley coming through the village at a swinging trot, with his umbrella tucked under his arm—for, to do him justice, he cared little for wind or weather—she stopped him to say what a pity she thought it that Mrs. Ward, under her peculiar circumstances, should permit a handsome young man to be staying with her; that several of the tradespeople had remarked on her conduct; and, indeed, from what she could gather, Mrs. Ward was held in very light esteem by many: and therefore "it *was* a pity—wasn't it?—that Mrs. Arnold should allow Regina, at her age (almost old enough to be confirmed), to be walking about publicly with a young man, who might be so very incorrect."

And Mr. Morley, becoming fierce (as the best of men will do when irritated) under the treble accusations of Winny, said that Mrs. Arnold gave him more trouble than all the rest of the parish put together; that she ought to recollect that she had been the wife of a priest, and to be ashamed of acting so irregularly—though what could you expect from a Frenchwoman? that he was driven a hundred ways at once, and could hardly find the day long enough, now the smallpox was so much about (here Winny leaped into the gutter with terror, for her fear of infection was almost a mania). But he supposed he must call on Mrs. Arnold and remonstrate with her, since she had been in some sort a clergyman's wife, though he was but a dissenting kind of a person after all. Thereupon the gentle Winny, who thought nothing a trouble that might cajole Mr. Morley, offered herself in his stead to take the job off his hands, and bully Mrs. Arnold in his name; but this suggestion was not liked, and he told her in such very plain terms to mind her own business, that her tender heart was wounded, and she cried—smiling all the way

she went—with the tears dropping off her nose the while, something in Cordelia's style—she always cried so; till she got home, and snapped at her mother, in return for having been snapped at herself.

Mr. Morley, therefore, took his way across the common the very next morning to see the delinquent; noway appeased by the glorious sunshine which, with the caprice common to our climate, had replaced the cold rain of the day before, and was streaming upon the magnificent oaks that stood on the verge of the table-land which formed the parish of Holmwood.

Under those oaks, the boast of the whole country, the very group that occupied his thoughts were now assembled. The delicate old lady was seated on a cloak, thrown over the large twisted roots of one of the trees; and the suspected Alban, leaning idly against the trunk, was conversing with her. At a little distance the superb figure of Mrs. Ward was seen, bending eagerly over her painting; while Regina, kneeling by her side, was watching the progress of her friend's pencil.

"Alban is quite incredulous, you see!" remarked Mrs. Ward, as she dipped her brush into a colour.

"I don't care!" replied Regina, greatly irritated.

"Holmwood is a wonderful place," said Alban coolly.

"And we are all so very brave by daylight—are we not, Regina?" exclaimed Mrs. Ward.

"And it is so very wise and grand not to believe," added Regina. "I don't see why it is impossible that some person should have looked at us through the window."

"Nor I, Miss Howard," said Alban. "It is, on the contrary, perfectly admissible to my reason that you should be looked at, whether through a window or not.",

Mrs. Arnold and Mrs. Ward both laughed; Regina drew up her head.

"When people become personal," she remarked with dignity, "there is an end of course to the conversation."

"As the conversation is said to be extinguished," replied Alban carelessly, "it will be superfluous

in me to hint, that there were no footmarks under the window."

"Ghosts don't leave footmarks—do they, Regina?" cried Mrs. Ward.

"It must be a very heavy person, ghost or not, who could make footmarks on a brick walk," answered Regina.

"Ah! we forgot the brick path," laughed Mrs. Ward, looking back at her son.

"You have drawn long enough, and are quite fatigued; you never know when to leave off," was his reply, coming up to her, and taking the pencils calmly out of her hand.

Regina noticed that he never used any endearing epithets to his mother; but his voice and manner suddenly softened whenever he spoke to her, and gave a tenderness to his address that no affectionate terms could have equalled. She could not help thinking that this manner, in so cold a person, was the most agreeable in the world.

"What shall I do without him, Regina?" asked Mrs. Ward with a sigh; "he goes back to Scotland on Tuesday."

"Then I may take my humble leave of him this afternoon," said Regina, mockingly. "To-morrow being Sunday, I suppose we shall see nothing of you, and Monday I shall pass the day at the Winters', on account of the concert; for we have a grand rehearsal in the morning."

"And what do you mean to wear, little Regina?"

"Only a white dress—a new one, though—of spotted muslin, that granny bought for me last week."

The latter part of this intelligence was conveyed in rather a raised voice, owing to a provoking smile that flashed for a moment over Alban's face.

"If I send you a wreath of natural flowers, will you wear them?" asked Mrs. Ward; "I'm rather clever at making up that sort of thing."

Regina gratefully accepted.

"What may that person want?" asked Mrs. Ward carelessly, indicating by a movement of her little sketch-book a gaunt gentleman standing in the path a little beyond the trees, and signing with his hand towards the party.

"It is Mr. Morley!" exclaimed Regina; "I

think he wishes to speak to one of us." But she paused, as if not finding his speeches refreshing enough to go in search of them.

Mr. Morley, after beckoning to Mrs. Arnold, to get up and come down to him, in vain—for she respected her own grey hairs, though he did not, and she waited quietly for him to come to her with his errand; Mr. Morley then advanced towards her, and called out, "I shall be at your house this evening, Mrs. Arnold, as I desire to speak with you;" and then he turned and left the group to themselves.

Now it is often the case, in this world, that when we are promised some little agreeable treat, and are quite looking forward to it, some trifling circumstance deprives us of the expected pleasure; but this perverse interruption rarely takes place when any thing disagreeable is hanging over our heads. So that Mr. Morley was ushered into Mrs. Arnold's dining-room about seven o'clock; and the charming old lady went down to receive him, while Regina, in the drawing-room above, was giving Mrs. Ward and her son, who had been per-

suaded to stay and pass the evening, a very lively account of her rector's and Miss Hopper's behaviour to her grandmama.

"All the harm I wish them both is, that they may marry each other, and then repent of it," cried Regina; "I say nothing against Mr. Morley, but both his wives *have died*—that's all!"

"And you think that Miss Hopper would fare no better," said Mrs. Ward, smiling.

"It would take a good deal to kill *her*, I should think," remarked Alban.

"It is entirely owing to Winny that Mr. Morley behaves with such disrespect to grandmama. As for me, I believe he looks upon me as an outcast, because I am not one of Miss Hopper's followers, like most of the young ladies in the neighbourhood."

"And what are their tenets, little Regina?" asked Mrs. Ward, laughing.

"They make a profusion of little worsted socks for babies, under Winny's orders, and they cultivate an unbounded love for the clergy. Miss Hopper loves all babies, dirty or clean, and squeaks at

them till the poor little animals are almost in fits."

"Here comes Mrs. Arnold, to tell us of her visitor," said Mrs. Ward.

"Now, granny, we are all impatience to hear what our sweet shepherd has been saying."

Alban laughed suddenly at the epithet. The old lady shook her head at Regina, and told her to make the tea.

"Oh! it's too bad to go in a corner, and whisper it to Mrs. Ward," cried Regina, as she busied herself at the tea-table. "I am dying with curiosity."

"Mrs. Arnold cannot trust you," said Alban.

"Do you mean to say I cannot keep a secret?" she asked hastily.

"Oh! not at all; you might *perhaps* keep a secret."

"What did you mean, then, Mr. Ward?"

"I need not tell you, Miss Arnold, because you know already."

"You meant to provoke me, for one thing."

"And I have succeeded. But it is very becoming."

"Will you tell me—yes or no?" asked Regina, colouring still more deeply.

"I could not help thinking that Mrs. Arnold had some view to Mr. Morley's personal safety in her silence. She thought your feelings would be too much for you when next you saw him."

Regina was about to make a quick retort, when she was interrupted by a burst of laughter from Mrs. Ward.

"No—dearest Mrs. Arnold!" she exclaimed; "I cannot keep this to myself; it is far too good. It is *you*, Alban, who cause that worthy man so much uneasiness, as Joseph Surface says. He insists upon it, that you are not my son! Who would have thought, Regina, that my silly joke to you could have spread so far?"

And she looked so very lovely, so fresh, and young, with her rosy laugh and glancing teeth, that Mr. Morley might almost have been forgiven for his doubts.

"It puzzles me to know what Mr. Morley has to do with it," said Alban haughtily; "whether I am your son or your grandfather."

"I believe, Mr. Ward," replied Mrs. Arnold gently, "that I am the object of his present anxiety. He arrogates to himself the right of selecting my friends."

"And do you not see, Alban," exclaimed Mrs. Ward, still laughing, "that if I am so flighty a creature as to entertain young men who are not related to me, that I might in time lead Mrs. Arnold into the same bad ways, to say nothing of my little Regina?"

He gazed at his mother with the grave perplexed expression Regina had often observed when Mrs. Ward was in high spirits, as if he wondered at her gaiety: then, catching her meaning, coloured suddenly with anger.

"I always ventured to disapprove your change of name," he said coldly, after a pause, "and you see now one of your difficulties; it is out of your power to prove any thing under a feigned name."

"But, my dearest Alban, I was *afraid:* it is a word you don't understand—but *you* do, Mrs. Arnold."

"Perfectly, my dear," replied the old lady,

taking her hand; "and, as far as *I* am concerned, I pay my own penetration the compliment of needing no proofs to assure me that you are worthy of esteem."

"You are all goodness, madam," said Alban, coming up to her—and, as she kindly extended her other hand to him, he kissed it with as much respect as he would have shewn to a queen.

"Well! but we must consult," said Mrs. Arnold.

"How are we to announce, dear Mrs. Ward, that this young gentleman has every right to visit you?"

"I advise my mother to resume her name at once," remarked Alban; "and then the gossips, far and near, will have no difficulty in finding for themselves every particular connected with her—our family is not unknown."

"Yes! but fancy persuading good Mrs. King, and Nelly my maid, that my real name is Willingham," cried Mrs. Ward, laughing. "I should like it very much, but they would never believe me."

"These English are so hard to convince," said Mrs. Arnold, with a little vexed look, "or else I should advise your speaking confidentially to Mr. Carter, your clergyman (a very good man), and offering to procure proofs, if he desires it, of all you assert."

"It would be so very embarrassing if he were to be incredulous," remarked Mrs. Ward. "I know I am in a difficulty; but I think Alban shall send me the certificate of his baptism, to be kept in reserve."

"And if any body tells me that Winny Hopper is not at the bottom of all this trouble, I won't believe them!" exclaimed Regina.

"Throw your glove down, Miss Howard," added Alban.

"He can't take it up if you do, Regina," laughed Mrs. Ward; "for he would hardly enter the lists as Miss Hopper's champion."

"What is to be done, Mrs. Arnold?" asked Alban.

"Nothing, I think, Mr. Ward," she replied; "we must wait. I am afraid that, if Miss Hopper

could throw any light upon Mrs. Ward's retreat, she would be glad to do so—and her true name would be a great help, you know."

"I see no objection to that," replied Alban; "it is my belief that Colonel Willingham, my father, is gone to South America. I feel sure that my mother could live here in perfect security."

"But he might return—I dare not!" said Mrs. Ward. "No! things must go on as they are."

"And now, granny," said Regina, "what can you say for Winny?"

"She is restless, my dear, and longs to discover what she fancies a secret; and, I believe, she talks herself into the belief that she is doing right, when we feel her to be very much in the wrong."

"And she wants to be first with Mr. Morley, and she envies Mrs. Ward her beauty, and she hates all those whom we love," cried Regina, all in a breath.

"And, my little Regina, the tea is ready to pour out," added Mrs. Arnold.

CHAPTER IX.

THE important day is come at last. All Bradford partakes of the excitement. "You might hear the pianos going all down Prior-street;" as Mr. Richard tells his mother when he comes in to his early dinner. The Sunday scholars of Miss Charlotte—whom she teaches to sing with exemplary skill and patience—have been busied from an early hour in decorating the music-room with festoons of evergreens and summer roses, for which they are severally rewarded by Mrs. Winter, as they go out, with a large glass of cowslip-wine, and an immense piece of plum-cake. The instruments are tuned and arranged on the platform. Regina has withdrawn from the tea-table, which the hospitable old lady has converted into a banquet of every delicacy

she could recollect, to make her toilet under the superintendence of Miss Winter. Miss Charlotte floats into the room devoted to the performers, to give the final touches to the sideboard of fruit and refreshments prepared for their gratification, and arranges her blue satin boddice and black ringlets before the glass. Mr. Bradford Winter saunters in soon after, not much better-looking than his brother Richard, but very smart and scented, with white gloves and curled hair; Miss Field and Miss Clark, with the two Misses Rogers, arrive next, with a roll of music apiece, and very stiff silk gowns. They sit drinking coffee, with flushed faces and trembling hands, and Mr. Bradford hands them cakes and pays them compliments. They think him very charming indeed. Then come the Misses Ramsay, with a great many bracelets on, as gay as peacocks; and they stand by the side-table eating rout-cakes, and ignoring the presence of the young ladies who live in the town. And then come the Misses Chilingworth, who give themselves still more airs, and decline lemonade, and freeze Mr. Bradford with mono-

syllables when he makes some remarks to them about the new opera.

Mr. Winter now glides in among his pupils, dressed with his usual delicate precision, and says something gentle and kind to each—quite as kind to Miss Field, the butterman's daughter, as to Miss Chillingworth, in her worked gauze and geranium bouquet; and, while he is going his round, Mr. Richard tumbles into the room, uncouth as ever, having, it is believed, made some vague attempt to arrange his hair, and calls out—"I say, father, have you seen Miss Howard? She is just stopping on the stairs to speak to mother. Just look out, that's all—'angels ever bright and fair!'" And with this quotation he falls into a chair by Miss Rogers, and stares audaciously at Miss Chillingworth's indignant countenance.

And when Regina, all unconscious of the announcement that has preceded her entrance, walks quietly into the room, they all feel the influence of a superior presence, though her worked muslin dress has no flounces, as Miss

Chillingworth observes; and the Misses Ramsay are sure you could buy all she has on for a couple of guineas. But Mr. Winter thinks that Raphael never depicted a more spiritual vision than that graceful head, with its dark satin tresses crowned with a spotless wreath of the double paper narcissus, replacing the scroll of hair which now droops in rich plaits upon the slender neck; while Mr. Bradford finds no compliment good enough for the occasion, and Mr. Richard leans back and looks round with a self-satisfied air, as if he coolly challenged the society to produce any thing to beat that!

Meanwhile the Ramsays flatter the Chillingworths with deep-drawn vulgar breaths of admiration; and then the quartett pass away the time with a little pleasant gossip, which Regina hears, though she is not invited to take any share in it.

"Do you know, Louisa," whispers Miss Ramsay, "Mrs. Arnold arrived just as we did, and she had with her such a handsome young man!"

"No! Mrs. Arnold? fancy her with a young man! Who could he be?"

"Regina must know—shall we ask her?" suggests Julia.

Miss Chillingworth looks haughty, and decides *not* to ask Regina. "After all, he could be nobody if he was with Mrs. Arnold," she declares.

"He is very like Lord Oswestry," remarks Eliza Ramsay.

"Impossible, child!" retorts Miss Chillingworth.

But Julia corroborates the likeness, and insists that the stranger is much better looking—that he has Lord Oswestry's air and complexion, without being so awfully pale.

"And Lord Oswestry is marked with the smallpox," adds Eliza.

"And stares insolently," says Julia.

"This young man had a pretty good stare of his own," says Eliza, laughing.

Miss Chillingworth loses her temper in defending Lord Oswestry, and she becomes so personal touching the incapacity of ordinary people to form any judgment on the qualities of men of rank, that the Ramsays withdraw their remarks, and declare his lordship to be perfection; while

Regina, who has recognised Alban by Miss Ramsay's description, is all astonishment to find that he has accompanied her grandmama to the concert.

"Eight o'clock, father!" cries Mr. Richard, and he runs up the steps to the platform, makes a rough kind of bow to the audience, and seizes his violoncello. Mr. Winter follows, courteously leading Regina to her place at the piano.

The office of opening the concert had been assigned to her, because it was generally understood that the more indifferent players were to begin the entertainment. She pulled off her gloves with a desperate effort, and then, catching sight of the whole long wide room, crowded with faces, she turned suddenly to Mr. Winter, and said—

"I'm afraid."

"Dear lady!" said Mr. Winter, with the gentle manner that took all the scorn out of his words, "they are only *people*. You are not afraid of Mrs. Ramsay? don't be afraid of a great many Mrs. Ramsays."

He had touched the right spring. Regina sat down as firmly as if she were playing alone with him and Mr. Richard. The old man took up his violin, Mr. Richard drew the stormy soul out of his violoncello—the lovers of music had a real treat.

But, after all her beautiful clear playing, she was handed down by Mr. Winter with very little applause; for Mrs. Arnold's fortune was very moderate, and there were not ten people in the room who knew whether she played ill or well, whereas there were two hundred who knew that Mrs. Chillingworth was a great lady, and Mrs. Ramsay as rich as a Jew: and it was well for Regina that she was contented with Mr. Winter's praise, as he thanked her for doing so much credit to his tuition; while Mr. Richard made her smile by exclaiming, as he brought her a glass of lemonade, "That he would like to see any one of the lot beat that—not even excepting his sister Charlotte on the harp."

But when Miss Chillingworth mounted the platform, there was such a clapping of hands that Mr. Winter told her to acknowledge her reception

by courtesying three times over; and when she broke down in that famous piece by Chaulien, the applause became louder still; and when, after several attempts to get on, she assaulted the piano, in a frenzy, with a shower of horrible chords in all manner of keys, the people seemed to be wild with delight, and continued to clap and cry bravo until she disappeared down the steps.

Mr. Richard's extraordinary faces during this strange performance—shuddering, gasping, and depicting a grotesque agony in every feature—made Regina laugh; and when Miss Chillingworth entered the waiting-room, looking very conscious and grand, and saw her rival so merry, she gave her credit for concealing her mortification by a clever piece of acting. She was succeeded by Miss Ramsay, whose performance was more feeble, but less distinguished by original embellishment. Sophia Chillingworth and the other Ramsays succeeded each other; but, as they had chosen to play single-handed, their performances, though tolerably correct, fell very flat when compared with the others. Miss Field and Miss

Clark, with the Misses Rogers, played a beautiful arrangement from Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, for four performers, on two pianos, accompanied by a Mr. Clark and a Mr. Rogers (two young gentlemen in training for the law) upon two cornets. This piece was in itself so beautiful, and so well executed, that it was loudly encored, which delighted Regina, who had drank in every note; while Miss Chillingworth remarked contemptuously, that "the noise was enough to stun any body." Miss Charlotte's fantasia on the harp, accompanied by her father and her two brothers, was equally well received; but that, Miss Chillingworth could more easily forgive, because, as she said, "those people got their living by it."

Regina had to open the second part with Schubert's little air. Her beautiful voice, trained with the utmost care, was of course worth hearing; yet, had it not been for some of the less select auditors at the lower end of the hall, she would have been quite abashed for want of the applause that was lavished on all the other performers. But the butterman was loud in her praises, and remarked

to those around him, that "she looked like a angel crowned with the lilies of the field, ahovering over the pianner;"—which was very near the truth, so slight and spiritual she seemed, with her earnest grey eyes, and a voice that soared above the instruments as sweet as the flute stop of an organ.

A trifling incident now gave a momentary check to the proceedings: Miss Clark declared herself hoarse—and she was to sing the *alto* part of the *Et Incarnatus;* she said it was fright, but Miss Field affirmed it was toffy, to which luxury Miss Clark was known to be much addicted. However, as Regina could clearly sing only the soprano, and as no one else knew how to read the *alto* clef, or indeed to sing at sight if they had known, the piece must have been given up, if Mr. Brand, who was loitering in the doorway, had not offered to find them a substitute among the audience.

He returned, leading a very pretty little girl, about two years younger than Regina, with bright golden hair, and large wondering blue eyes, whom he introduced as Miss Carleton.

"Do you know the *alto* part?" asked Regina kindly, offering her the book.

"Yes, I have practised it lately," she answered, blushing shyly. "Mr Brand spoke of the piece some time ago, and said how beautifully you sang it."

"Then you live near?" said Regina, wondering how so pretty a face could have escaped her observation.

"No—I live at Kensington with my uncle and aunt; but I am staying for a few weeks with Mr. Morley."

"Miss Carleton's mother was Mr. Morley's second wife," said Mr. Brand aside to Regina; "his five younger children are therefore her half-sisters. Her mother left all her fortune to Mr. Morley, and this child is being educated by her uncle and aunt, with a view to her going out as a governess."

"I suppose you think that all right!" exclaimed Regina warmly.

"I am sure I shall think the *Et Incarnatus* all right," returned Mr. Brand, evading the question;

"you will find Miss Carleton's voice very charming."

Regina was all kindness to the little girl, and whispered her not to be afraid when they went on the platform; and Miss Carleton clung to her arm, and read out of her book. She had a rich, full *alto* voice, and sang very correctly; and Regina took quite a fancy to her pretty little timid companion. The national anthem closed the concert, in which Miss Carleton still took Miss Clark's part; and then, as soon as the last notes of the organ had died away, the performers came down and mixed with the audience. The Misses Chillingworth were received with a perfect ovation; the Ramsays were generally complimented; Regina glided unnoticed behind them. Miss Carleton wished her good-night with a warm shake of the hand, and then Regina succeeded in making her way to her grandmama's side. Mrs. Arnold gave her a smile of approbation—and Alban looked steadily at her, and said calmly, "Thank you!"

"The butterman is here!" cried Regina all in a breath; "and he said I was a angel, for Mr. Rich-

ard told me so! And I sang my very best on his account."

"Well, Regina," said Mrs. Chillingworth, turning round with a glare, "I think you are getting on: yes, you play better, certainly, than when I heard you last."

As Mrs. Chillingworth had not heard her for three years, Regina hoped she did.

And then Mrs. Ramsay, who had been extolling the Misses Chillingworth in her loudest tone, stretched out her hand to Regina, and with her large head all on one side, said—"You here, Regina! You have not been playing, have you?"

"Oh, no! Mrs. Ramsay!" answered Regina eagerly.

"My little Regina," remonstrated Mrs. Arnold.

"I could not call my little attempt, *playing!*" she rejoined with mock humility.

Alban smiled, and looked at her as if he was about to speak; but thought better of it, and directed his gaze calmly among the audience.

"Never mind!" said Mrs. Ramsay, good naturedly, "you will do better another time; you

know you are younger than Julia, and she has such talent—such great talent! We had a gentleman dining with us the other day, and he was talking of my daughters, and saying how grateful I ought to feel that they were so gifted. He remarked at the time that Julia resembled Lady Oswestry in her style of beauty."

As Lady Oswestry was a proverb in the country for her beauty, Regina thought this pretty well, even for Mrs. Ramsay. But she had not half done boasting; and Mrs. Arnold was obliged to say in her little voice, which stood but a poor chance of making head against Mrs. Ramsay's great one—"My dear Mrs. Ramsay, I must say good-night, for my little fly is announced, and is taking up the place of better vehicles."

Very scornful did Mrs. Ramsay look at the mention of the little fly, and very comfortably did she reflect on the large carriage, with its large grey horses, which was to have the honour of drawing her to her large house, about a mile from the town.

The moon was pouring a flood of light and deep

black shadow over the quaint old town. There stood the curious timber house, with its black beams on a white ground; and the tall church with its bell-tower hard by; and the shallow steps leading up to the market-place, touched with silver light; and the silence, always solemn and expressive, of a town by night—so many buildings closed, so many restless lives hushed, and the summer air so ineffably sweet and fresh—Regina felt an intense longing to walk, instead of being shut up in the fly, and she said so to Mrs. Arnold.

"Just only across the common, granny; how lovely it would look!"

"My little Regina, I should have liked it of all things fifty years ago," said Mrs Arnold; "but now I'm afraid of the dew."

"If you will allow me to escort Miss Howard across the common," Alban suggested, "I think we shall walk as fast as you will drive."

Mrs. Arnold, who seldom found it in her heart to deny Regina any thing, consented, and desired the driver to go at a foot-pace, while Alban

offered his arm to his companion, and they set forward.

"That was very good-natured, and I'm much obliged to you," began Regina with her whimsical frankness.

"And I'm obliged to *you*," he said with equal frankness. "I think I shall never forget your singing to-night."

"I'm glad I sang well," answered Regina; "I wished to do so for many reasons."

"May I ask what reasons?"

"I wished of course to please grandmama; and then I was very anxious to do credit to Mr. Winter's teaching—for he takes a great deal of pains with me, much more than I can repay."

"I am sorry for that."

"Sorry?"

"Yes—I think those people should be paid, and have done with it."

"But there are so many things that you cannot pay. Why, a servant who has nursed you kindly and faithfully, you cannot pay with money. Grandmama often says she can never pay Mrs.

Nutt, who waited on my grandfather in his last illness. But I suppose," she added hesitatingly, "that you don't like to feel grateful."

"Yes, I do—to my equals; I like to feel grateful to Mrs. Arnold and you for your kindness to my mother."

"It's well," said Regina, half jesting, "that you will allow any body to be your equals."

"Have you come to the end of your reasons?" he asked.

"No—I had one more; and I'm almost afraid it was the strongest—but you would not understand it."

"And why not?"

"Because you are a man; and it is only women who feel or understand slights. There were many of the neighbours present who I knew would despise my playing and singing—not because it was bad, but because I was poor—and so I resolved to do my very best. You need not laugh."

"It was very natural. And you did your very best; you sang divinely."

Regina coloured, and trembled with pleasure;

and they walked on for some time, saying very little.

Then Alban stopped and remarked on the great oaks drinking in the moonshine in large masses—not a leaf stirring; the wide pale sky behind unbroken by a single cloud. As they stood, the light shone down on Regina's graceful head, with its spotless crown, and illuminated her fine pale features with such an ethereal radiance as no pencil could imitate or pen describe. As Alban gazed at her, he was reminded of a saint he had once seen pictured on a church window, with the halo of the setting sun shining all round and through her form, till it seemed as if the air was made glorious with the radiant presence of a blessed spirit. In that semblance Regina was present to his thoughts during years of absence; and he could no more efface that moment from his memory, than we can any of us banish one of the grave recollections of life from that mysterious garner of our thoughts.

"My dear," said Mrs. Arnold, leaning from the window of the carriage, "do not let Mr. Alban

pass the Dykeham turning. You can then get in, for we are almost at home."

Regina longed to say that she would rather walk that little way; but a new feeling of shyness stopped her. It would be asking Alban to come a little out of his road, and seem as if—as if, she hardly knew what.

But before she had done thinking, Alban said, "I must see you to your own door, Mrs. Arnold—I can cross the fields to Dykeham. You will walk those few steps farther, will you not?"

Regina hesitated. Now, that he addressed her for the first time in that tone he so often used to his mother, she could hardly reply to the very thing she wished before.

"Do give me those few minutes more," he urged.

"Yes—I prefer walking," she said hurriedly, with a strange feeling of constraint, a nervous dread of getting home, and having to say good-by; a wonder how he would take leave of them.

But they were soon at the gate. Alban handed out Mrs. Arnold, and thanked her and bade her

farewell, and shook hands with Regina and was gone, all in a minute.

"How hateful it is to say good-by to people, granny, even when they are almost strangers!" said Regina, as they sat drinking coffee, before they went to bed.

"So it is, my little Regina," said Mrs. Arnold; "and I can't help thinking of poor Mrs. Ward—how sad she feels to night. I wish she was with us."

"I will go to her to-morrow, granny, and bring her here to spend the day; she will feel so lonely."

"Do, my little Regina. I was very much pleased with your performances, and you looked tolerably," said the old lady with a fond smile.

"Ah, granny!" cried Regina, "if I were but rich, some of the people would have thought so too—but I never shall be."

"I hope not, my little one," replied Mrs. Arnold, seriously.

"Ah, granny! I know what you mean about snares and so forth; but I should like to be a great

lady, and intimate with great people, if it were only to shew Mrs. Chillingworth——"

"Every attention," rejoined Mrs. Arnold with her *fin sourire*.

CHAPTER X.

The paces of time have been recorded by a great hand, whose lightest work will never die; and nothing more remains to be said in illustration of the subject. Time stole over Regina's head with very easy footsteps for the next year. She spent a great deal of her time with Mrs. Ward; going over to Dykeham, and frequently persuading her friend to return and spend the day with her grandmama. During the winter, indeed, these late visits were interrupted, because the cold air affected Mrs. Ward, and brought on her cough and spasms, so as often to alarm her friends, and induce them to urge her to consult their doctor.

But Mrs. Ward laughed away their fears, and said that Mrs. Arnold was her doctor, and kindness her best prescription; and that she never

failed to bring with her benign face. And by this time she had got to call Mrs. Arnold "granny," as Regina did; and indeed there subsisted between them almost the affection of mother and daughter.

Very little intercourse took place between Mrs. Arnold and her rector. Mr. Morley never forgave her friendship for Mrs. Ward, and her positive disbelief in all Miss Hopper's charitable suspicions. She made some kindly attempts to show attention to his daughters; but her advances received so decided a check on his side, that she was obliged to give them up; and Regina was therefore denied the privilege of associating with the seven Misses Morley.

For a few weeks after the concert, Regina caught a glimpse now and then of the pretty Miss Carleton in her walks, and then a bright smile and a glance of recognition passed between them; but, as she was always in company with some of her half-sisters, no farther advances could be made towards intimacy.

But Mr. Brand, who was suspected of not think-

ing exactly like his rector on many points, was guilty of keeping up a sociable acquaintance with Mrs. Arnold. More than that, for few days passed that he did not find his way to the brick house; and people began to accuse him of having an eye to Miss Howard, who was growing now quite tall and womanly. Only Mr. Brand had exactly one hundred a year besides his curacy, and Regina, while her grandmother lived, had nothing at all. He had too much sense to think of making her an offer; only, like many other men, he had not sense enough to let her alone, but kept constantly calling, and hearing her sing, and dropping in to tea, and talking over books—for he was an accomplished man, and Regina had inherited her grandmother's taste for literature—and looking over her drawings, and directing her little charities; and, though he had not much pretension to good looks, yet he was a gentleman in manners and feelings, and well it was for Regina that she had seen somebody she liked better. For the way in which just such a man, quite as good as Mr. Brand, will tamper with a girl's feelings as a cat plays with a mouse, and

leave her to die of the harass, if it amuses her to do so, is a fact well known to all people who choose to keep their eyes open, however limited may be their circle of acquaintance. It is your good men only who do this; bad men have a different mode of proceeding, which fails altogether with women of delicate minds, and therefore perhaps as common acquaintance they are rather to be preferred.

But it is amazing how much interest Winny took in Mr. Brand's behaviour; how she admonished him upon the sin of flirting; and how she would pursue him across the common, all the way from the village school to Mrs. Arnold's house; and catching him in the very fact, with his foot on the scraper, would find out that she also wanted to call on Mrs. Arnold, and so would go in with him; which he rather liked, for then he could leave Winny to talk to Mrs. Arnold, while he engrossed Regina.

I wish I could say that Winny improved as she grew older; but the fact is, she did not. People whispered that she looked down upon her home

duties, while she ran about courting the clergymen and dictating to the poor, so that her lame sickly mother was totally neglected; and, as Winny dined out most days with somebody or other, it was hinted what very little shabby scraps of dinners were reserved for poor Mrs. Hopper at home. But Winny throve and prospered, and was greatly admired far and near. And, though Mrs. Arnold discouraged village gossip in her house, yet Becky did contrive to tell Regina that the poor (generally acute judges of their superiors' conduct) wondered at Miss Hopper looking after a young man like Mr. Brand, as much as they wondered at her horrid way of walking, or her singular soprano voice. It did now and then strike Regina what a remarkably elastic age Miss Hopper's was. Sometimes it was almost venerable, and she would go to see Mr. Brand in his lodgings when he had a cold, or walk home from Bradford tête-à-tête with Mr. Morley, quite late, you know, in the evening; and then it would shut up suddenly like a telescope, and she would frisk and skip the youngest little kitten in the parish—making herself quite a contemporary

of Agatha Morley, who wore trousers, and was not yet out of short division.

One fine hot July morning, Mr. Brand was sitting with Mrs. Arnold and Regina, having called apparently to speak about some grey duffle cloaks for certain old women in the parish, which really would not be wanted for the next six months. Regina was copying an engraving of Lord Falkland from a book that was going the round of the society, Mr. Brand was cutting her pencils, and Mrs. Arnold was taking down the old women's names at the other table, when Miss Hopper was announced.

"Of all the people in the world!" as Mr. Brand said half audibly, while he pointed the pencil he had taken up. Mrs. Arnold left her writing, and politely inquired after Mrs. Hopper.

"Quite well, thank you. Oh, her lameness is nothing; she has always been a little lame! Drawing, Regina? Mr. Brand giving you a lesson?"

"Taking a lesson, Miss Hopper," replied Mr. Brand, turning over the sketches in the portfolio beside Regina, with the privileged air of a frequent

guest. She laid her hand on the sheet he was just about to take up.

"No, pray, Mr. Brand—not that one."

"I wanted to look again at your sketch of Prince Rupert."

"There he is young, and there old," said Regina, selecting the two studies, and laying them before him. "I hope you moralize duly on the difference, Mr. Brand. To this complexion must we come at last—or something very near it."

"Nothing near it, in some cases, Miss Howard!"

His eye directed hers to the soft bloom that still lingered on her grandmother's cheek. Regina smiled and looked gratified, almost (Winny thought) affectionate.

"I think, Regina," she cried, "we may trust Mr. Brand to draw a profitable moral from every thing; I think we all remember his sermon last Sunday upon Jacob's ladder."

"I think we do know the sweet Roman hand!" quoted Regina, looking at Mr. Brand with so exactly the tone and air of Malvolio when he addresses Olivia, that he fairly burst out into an

uncontrolled peal of laughter; while Mrs. Arnold shook her head, in the vain notion that she was concealing her smiles.

Winny looked indignant. She thought they were laughing at her, and, with a tear in her treble voice, begged to be allowed to know what the joke was.

"I must lay the blame on Miss Howard," said Mr. Brand, struggling to regain his composure.

Regina watched him until he had just attained this desirable object, and then suddenly placed before him, taking care to screen it with the leaf of her portfolio, an exact likeness of Winny herself, on her very highest pair of clogs, which sent him off again into a peal of laughter that threatened to be inextinguishable.

"They are both very silly, Miss Hopper," remarked Mrs. Arnold in her little peacemaking tone.

"Malvolio, you know, Miss Hopper?" said Regina—Miss Hopper didn't know.

"Oh! you should read *Twelfth Night*, Miss Hopper," pursued Regina; "or rather, if you wish

to enjoy it thoroughly, you should coax Mr. Brand to read it to you the next time he has a cold—you know."

This rather meaning allusion to Miss Hopper's visits, made her feel very ill-natured. She tried to find an arrow to fling at Regina in return.

"Haven't you taken Mr. Brand's portrait yet, Regina?" she asked.

"No, but I mean to attempt him the very first time I can catch a sight of him in his Geneva gown. I'm such a Protestant, Miss Hopper! and you know, Mr. Brand, I think your white robe so extremely demi-toilette."

"I know, Miss Howard, you are incorrigible!" he answered, with a smile. Winny could not think what made him look so pleased. All her yawning did not seem to charm him so much as Regina's impertinence.

"Besides, the naughty Papists preach in the alb," continued Regina. "I would 'wear my rue with a difference,' if I were a clergyman! Although I hope you don't flatter yourself that your white gown is any thing like a lovely laced alb."

"You are worse than usual to-day, Miss Howard; I appeal to Mrs. Arnold."

"I think she is, Mr. Brand. I was just doubting whether I should be able to induce you to take your luncheon with us to-day, after all this pertness."

"Mr. Brand must, if it is only to shew that he bears no malice," laughed Regina.

Mr. Brand seemed perfectly contented to give this proof of his placable disposition.

Mrs. Arnold then felt obliged, in common politeness, to beg Winny to do the same; which she agreed to with the selfish eagerness and want of tact that characterised all her proceedings.

"And, as luncheon is not quite ready," exclaimed Regina, "I know Mr. Brand will read me the Grave scene in Hamlet, while I finish my sketch."

He took the volume, laughing good-humouredly; Mrs. Arnold declared it was a pleasure Regina had not deserved.

"It's in a play—isn't it?" asked Winny, fidgeting uneasily on her chair.

"Yes, rather a famous play in its time," said

Regina carelessly; "but you forget, Miss Hopper; you have no objection to plays *now;* all *that* was in my grandfather's day."

"The sooner I begin the better, I think," said Mr. Brand smiling. Regina nodded, and went on drawing, with the pleased consciousness that he would come upon some strong expressions from Laertes, which could not be omitted with any regard to the sense of the dialogue; and which would make the innocent Winny, she hoped, run out of the house in dismay. But Winny had no mind to run out of the house, while there was a nice young man in it; she sat, smiling patiently, while Mr. Brand, who possessed the rare talent of dramatic reading, gave the exquisite dialogue between Hamlet and the gravedigger; and, though she certainly was startled by Laertes' fierce attack upon the priest, she bore it with such fortitude, that Regina feared the still more violent outburst against Hamlet would equally fail to dislodge her.

But her equanimity was destined to be spared this trial. At that very moment Mrs. Ward was

announced, and she came in, looking so hurried and flushed—so excited either by joy or grief, Winny could not tell which, she set herself diligently to listen.

Regina looked anxiously at her friend while Mrs. Arnold was speaking her sweet placid welcome.

"Don't you wonder at me, granny, walking to see you through all this heat?" asked Mrs. Ward, laughing nervously.

"I am inclined to scold you, my dear; but I will give you some luncheon instead."

"Thank you, granny, I can't eat; but I am very thirsty."

They assembled round the table in the cheerful dining parlour, the room was cool and dark, and the simple meal was laid out with taste. There was a fresh, delicate fish salad, bread and butter, and a plate of excellent cakes; a perforated china dish, made to imitate an osier basket, was heaped with fragrant strawberries; and a large glass jug of iced lemonade, all dewy with the cold, completed the repast.

"This is delicious, Regina," said Mrs. Ward; "your iceing powders are perfection."

"Every thing is perfection here," remarked Mr. Brand.

Mrs. Ward's eye lit on Regina for a moment with a comic look, and then went back to its restless expression. Regina grew more anxious every moment. Could any thing have happened to Alban? No! Mrs. Ward would have been wholly unnerved if that were the case. She did not know how to interpret her friend's countenance. She only wished, with all her might, that the others would go. But there sat Winny, spearing her strawberries one by one with angular precision, and Mr. Brand, slowly sipping his lemonade and talking to Mrs. Arnold about Krummacher, as calmly as if they were not exhausting her patience.

At last Mr. Brand rose to go, and then you may be sure Winny jumped up, and remarked that they were going the same way.

As soon as they were out of the house, Mrs. Ward drew her chair close to Mrs. Arnold, and

said gently, "Granny, I learned this morning that I am a widow."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Arnold, "you are assured of my sympathy, whether you need it much or little. Some you must require when the most solemn act of your life is thus annulled."

"Yes! your sympathy is very dear to me," said Mrs. Ward hurriedly, "and yours, Regina; but, to be free, you must have been abased to a slavery as bitter as mine to feel the word. How often have I looked forward to death to end my struggles, but not his!"

"And where was he?" asked Mrs. Arnold.

"In South America; Alban received the news, and sent it on to me. He will be here in a few days; but there is very little business to transact, I imagine. Colonel Willingham has spared me that trouble; the only trouble he ever spared me," she added with a smile. "And now Alban advises me to resume my name. It will be enough to say that I assume it in consequence of the death of a relation."

"You will not think of going home to-day, my dear," said Mrs. Arnold; "you shall pass it quietly with us, and Field shall call at Dykeham to let them know."

"Oh, thank you! that is just what I shall most like; it is such a comfort to have friends to speak to when your mind is full."

"Only this afternoon," said Regina, as she established her friend on the sofa by the open drawing-room window; "you shall sleep instead of talking."

"No! little Regina," returned Mrs. Willingham; "come and sit by me in that lowest chair, and I will tell you my history:—

"I was a very rich heiress—I hardly know how rich, for I had property in various ways; as it is all gone, that little matters. One of my guardians—for I was an orphan, Regina—tried to marry me to his son; but, failing that, he encouraged the suit of Sir Herbert Willingham, whose noble estate of Beyminstre gave him a fitting claim upon my wealth. I wish he had loved me less; but he threw into his attachment all the force and

tenacity of a nature, proud, energetic, and sensitive, almost to disease.

"Without being able to share his feelings, I was touched and gratified by his devotion; and his wealth and character alike enabled me to feel secure that I was chosen for myself, not for my fortune. And I fancied, because I could not return or even understand his idolatry, that my nature was incapable of an ardent attachment, and that I must content myself with the tranquil regard which he inspired."

Mrs. Willingham paused. "I hate to look back to that period," she said. "I was to blame; but what an expiation has my life been ever since! Shortly before our marriage, his younger brother returned from abroad. It was the year after Waterloo, and you cannot imagine the absurd enthusiasm with which every one was received who had been in the war. Those who fought for pay, or for amusement, or because they couldn't help it, were welcomed with as much solemn admiration as if they had offered up their lives to the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre. It sickens

me now to think of it. I was more extravagant, more wildly besotted, than any of them. Colonel Willingham was brave of course; his fame had preceded him, and I fell in love with him at first sight. I was but seventeen; he was a practised man of the world. He wanted money, and he followed up the impression he saw he had made. Sir Herbert was obliged to be absent for a short time before our marriage, and Colonel Willingham persuaded me to take advantage of my few remaining days of liberty, and elope with him before his brother's return. This little I will say for myself, that I urged more open measures. I wished to tell Sir Herbert plainly that my heart had been won, and require him to give me back my promise. But I was overruled; I was in love, and therefore persuaded to any thing; and we set off for Scotland the day before Sir Herbert's return.

"One incident I recollect: Herbert's own servant had discovered our secret just as we were starting, and followed me to the door of the chaise with the most earnest entreaties; he even hung on

to the heads of the leaders in the vain attempt to stop our flight. Colonel Willingham drove over him, and he was for a long time incapacitated from giving the alarm.

"Many years afterwards I learned that Sir Herbert had munificently rewarded this poor man's interference, and established him in a house of his own. His name was Baker."

"The miser!" cried Regina. "Poor Sir Herbert!"

"Yes! his whole life was changed; he made no parade of his feelings, but he became so eccentric that Colonel Willingham tried to prove him insane, in order to get the property into his own hands. The attempt failed; but, if Sir Herbert could hate him more, such a step would of course have deepened the feeling. Well, a few months convinced me of my mistake; and I struggled not to believe as long as I could—struggled as wretches might have striven in the hands of the executioner in the old days of torture, not so much for life as for a cessation from pain. I saw all my fortune scattering to the winds, and

I did not care at all. I could not force myself to mind it, until I thought of my child. He would be, literally, a beggar. Sir Herbert would marry one day out of pique, and his heirs would possess Beyminstre; and Alban would have nothing, not even the means of earning his own bread.

"And the time at last came when we were beggars, and I knew want; and lived, selling one by one such articles of value as Colonel Willingham had not taken from me to adorn his favourites: when a relation died, leaving me twenty thousand pounds, tied up with all the formalities of the law, to save it from falling into my husband's hands. You may suppose that no intercourse whatever had passed between Sir Herbert and ourselves since my marriage; but I had some reason to hope sometimes, that towards me and my son he was not so bitter as I deserved. When I was very ill, at the time of my greatest destitution, a physician attended me constantly, and said that he was liberally paid by an unknown hand. As soon as I received my legacy, I

intended purchasing a commission for Alban; but, when I set on foot the proper inquiries, I found it had just been done, the money paid, I suppose, by the same unknown benefactor. It struck me that, as Sir Herbert had not married, he naturally looked upon Alban as his successor, and desired that he should be placed in a position suited to his future prospects."

"And how old is Sir Herbert?" asked Regina.

"Twenty years older than I am," replied Mrs. Willingham.

"But my troubles were not over. Colonel Willingham heard of my legacy, and wanted it. It gave rise to such terrible scenes, to such abuse, such violence, that, if it had not been for Alban, I believe I should have yielded, and signed it away. Twice I gave myself up for lost. I thought he would have killed me; but once Alban saved me, and the other time I believe my husband reflected, that if I died the money would go straight to my son. In all these degrading scenes, Alban never lost his temper or his self-possession, and never

behaved to his parent otherwise than he would have behaved to a father more worthy of such a son."

"And then, Mrs. Willingham——"

"Then, Alban being in Scotland, I took fright at being alone in London, exposed to the chance of my husband's visits; I consulted my lawyer, changed my name, and came here, my little Regina. And, if you did but know how Alban has detested that unlucky name of Ward—how he hated being called by it, or hearing me addressed as Mrs. Ward! Do you know, Regina, often, when I am most miserable, I cannot help laughing if a thought strikes me? and to see him draw back his head when you have said Mr. Ward, has often set me off, knowing him as I do."

"My dear!" said Mrs. Arnold, coming up to the sofa, "I will not let you speak another word till dinner-time."

"Then kiss me, granny, and I will lie quite still."

"Regina, how is it that you never have asked me for the sketch I made of you?"

"Because I thought you had not had time to finish it, Mrs. Willingham."

"Well! Alban carried it off, unfinished as it was; he thought it so precious as a specimen of my skill in portraiture—nothing but that!"

CHAPTER XI.

Regina often wished that Mrs. Willingham had not made that unlucky remark about her picture. She felt quite sure that Alban had never thought of her in that way. He was far too great a person, with Beyminstre in the distance, to contemplate for a moment so disproportioned a match.

Mrs. Willingham was always making her blush by such allusions whenever she received a letter from her son. She would mention that Alban desired his *kindest* regards to the young *prima donna*, and hoped that she practised her singing diligently. Or she would say, "You have no Scotch relations, have you, Regina?—because Alban remarks that he has not happened to see any one in Scotland who resembles you; now that

is not very wonderful, as you have no connections there."

Regina did not know why she should feel so conscious; but she quite dreaded Mrs. Willingham's penetrating look whenever she mentioned her son. She was wretched at the idea of his returning, and took care never to go to Dykeham as the time of his arrival drew near.

The neighbours took Mrs. Willingham's change of name more kindly than could have been expected. In her anxiety to escape all remark or discussion, she did not go into weeds; but her deep mourning enabled people to believe that she *had* lost a relation, and therefore might be entitled to property that required such a measure. Miss Hopper felt it right to ask Regina, whether Mrs. Willingham had received a large addition to her means; but it may be supposed that Regina expressed the most total ignorance on the subject.

One day she received at breakfast-time a little note from Dykeham, with these few words:—

"My Dear Regina—Alban did not come last night as I half expected, and I have not seen you

for four days. I don't like to be disappointed both of my son and my daughter; so put on your pretty little straw bonnet trimmed with violets, and walk through the fields to Dykeham, before the sun grows hot.—Your affectionate

"Regina Willingham."

Whatever Mrs. Willingham asked her, Regina was pretty sure to do; she tied on her bonnet and little black silk cloak, took a scroll of drawing-paper in her hand, which her friend had commissioned her to get in Bradford, and set off directly.

She walked on slowly, her eyes bent to the ground, occupied with her own thoughts; hoping, if the truth must be told, that Mrs. Willingham would not be in one of her rallying moods. When she reached the gate leading to the Dykeham fields, a gentleman threw it open for her, taking off his hat as he did so. She looked up; it was Alban.

"I was coming for you," he said quietly; and she felt his grave eyes scanning her from head to foot.

"When did you arrive, Mr. Willingham?" she

asked. "I had a note from Dykeham not half an hour ago, complaining that you had not come."

He smiled briefly, and said, "I believe I was at Dykeham when the note was written. The mail set me down there at five o'clock this morning."

"Oh!" said Regina.

"My mother wished to see you, notwithstanding," he added; "and, you know, she will have her way."

"Yes," replied his companion.

"Now let me carry your music," he said.

"It is Mrs. Willingham's property," she returned.

"Then I may venture to look at it," he remarked.

She suffered him quietly to undo the scroll.

"So!" he said, with his peculiar smile, as he unrolled the blank sheet of paper.

"Don't crumple it," said Regina.

"Why did you let me open it? you knew it was not music," he observed.

"I thought it a pity you should not have your way in such a trifle," she returned.

"And how does your music go on?"

"Oh! I have left off learning now; grandmama did not quite like my walking to Bradford so often with only Becky."

"Your grandmama was quite right," he said; and his eye scanned her graceful figure again with a look of approbation.

"Now, look, Mr. Willingham!" said Regina suddenly; "there is the miser—the old man who peeped in at the window that evening; do you remember?"

"That withered old man at the stile? Is he mad?"

"I never heard he was."

The old man moved, to give place to Regina, and gazed at her attentively as Alban handed her over.

"I am glad you do not spring down in the reckless manner you used to do," he remarked.

"Consider my age, Mr. Willingham!" exclaimed Regina; "I am obliged to be discreet, often against my will."

It was odd she did not feel embarrassed when

alone with him. His composure secured her own. It was quite different when Mrs. Willingham met them laughing in the porch.

"So! Alban has succeeded in bringing you," she said; "I thought we were never to meet again; thank you, though, very much for my paper."

"Is it right, Mrs. Willingham?"

"Exact; just the proper roughness for water colour—is she not grown, Alban?"

"Very much, I think," he replied.

"Grown *what?*" she asked, looking up archly into his face.

"Tall," he said, calmly.

"It is a matter-of-fact age, Regina!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham, drawing her into the sitting-room: "we must take it as we find it; we cannot change things."

"We cannot change others, but I think we can help being matter-of-fact ourselves; I dread nothing more than becoming like other people," answered Regina.

"I suppose, by that grave inclination of his head, he means something profound, like Lord Burghley,"

exclaimed Mrs. Willingham. "I will interpret for him. He means that you cannot, if you try, become like other people; in your case, nature and education alike forbid it."

"Give me your paper, and I will fold it for you," he said; "it will fall a sacrifice to your eloquence in another minute."

"Let us go out into the meadow and sit by the brook," said Mrs. Willingham, "when this gentleman has finished his occupation: and perhaps he will read to us; though he cannot rival Mr. Brand in that accomplishment. Eh! Regina?"

"Mr. Brand reads beautifully," Regina admitted.

"I am ready when you are," returned Alban, who was quietly folding the paper, without looking up.

"Go on!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham. "I have to get my things together first; you will help me, I know, little Regina—by the way, what a becoming bonnet that is of yours; don't you think so, Alban?"

He looked at Regina for a moment, and then

said, "Miss Howard had rather I did not answer that question."

Which was the truth.

They were very happy sitting under the tall ash-trees that morning, at least Regina was. They worked idly, and chatted; Alban was curious about Miss Hopper, and Regina could not help giving one or two dramatic scenes, in which that lady was represented persecuting Mr. Brand, or crying at one of Mr. Morley's unceremonious lectures. She did the crying so well, minus the tears, that Mrs. Willingham shed real tears (of laughter), and even Alban's grave smile deepened into mirth. Then Mrs. Willingham insisted on her reading to them some of Lamartine's delightful little story *Le Tailleur de Pierre de Saint Point;* and she could not help knowing that she read French perfectly, and Alban admired the reading, but condemned the book; and Mrs. Willingham joined Regina in defending it, and assailing his stubborn English prejudices. And then the society, the very presence of Mrs. Willingham, was to her as fresh a delight as ever. It was a pleasure to

sit near her, to watch her resting, with the superb grace of a Circassian, after her walk; to gaze on her pearly hand blazing with jewels; to see an idea steal into her dark blue eyes, and unclose her beautiful lips even before her languid voice was heard. And there was a vein of humour and of quaint illustration in what she said, that was still more piquant from being spoken in so indolent a manner.

If Regina had a wish, it was that Mrs. Willingham would not throw so much meaning into her jests when speaking to her son. She felt that, setting all else aside, the very devotion that Alban had for his mother, placed him at a greater distance from her than even the future possession of Beyminstre. *She* had never seen a woman who could compete with Mrs. Willingham, either in beauty or acquirement; and the high standard which his mother's qualities raised in his mind, would make him more than commonly fastidious in his ideas of women. All her little vanities and pleasant self-conceits dwindled away, as they always do, before the first dawn of a true attachment, like stars

before the sun. She had no beauty, scarcely any merit; only a little school-girl acquirement, and some truth and earnestness, which she could not expect a chance acquaintance to find out. What a trifling unformed girl she seemed to herself; she wondered how she could talk and laugh with him as she had done; and the next moment some odd thing he said made her laugh and jest as easily as before.

However, though Mrs. Willingham scolded, Regina could not spend the whole day away from her grandmama, and she was obliged to take leave; and then Mr. Willingham *would* escort her through the fields, he was so very well-bred—that was the only reason; and when he opened the last gate for her (and she could not help thinking that people in a certain class even opened gates better than others), and she crossed the lane to her grandmama's field, she happened to turn round, and her heart gave a sudden throb to see him standing just where they parted, looking after her as it seemed. But he raised his hat calmly when he met her eye, and walked back with such composure

that she was ashamed of herself for the thought; and tormented herself all day, without being able to make out whether he would or would not consider that her unlucky movement had been without design. The next day, Mrs. Willingham and her son walked over to Holmwood, and found Mr. Brand, as they might often have done, sitting with Mrs. Arnold and Regina at the drawing-room table, and tearing a note into alumets by way of pretending to be employed.

Regina was searching in her netting-box for some silver.

"There, Mr. Brand," she said, scattering some six or seven shillings before him, "that's all my worldly wealth at present, all my disposable property in the way of charity till next month; that will furnish Goody Leech with the flannel—well, *tunic*, grandmama—of which she stands in need; but it will *not* enable me to subscribe (tell Miss Hopper, with my love) to the 'Ladies' Babies' anti Godfrey's-Cordial-Association,' unless she would like to accept of the three-halfpence change which I foresee will remain from the tunic."

"My dear Regina, do not be so ridiculous!" urged Mrs. Arnold.

"Well, then, Miss Howard," he remarked, "you will buy the garment for Widow Leech."

"No—*you*, Mr. Brand; you are a better judge of flannel than I am; and, if you go to market judiciously, you may squeeze a pair of stockings besides out of the money."

"What is this weighty question?" asked Mrs. Willingham, drawing her chair in to the table.

Regina told her, while Mr. Brand piled the shillings into a little heap together before her, as if thinking that the best way of declining the commission; or perhaps imagining that it was rather a waste of time to have recourse to words. He then rose to take leave, glancing rather suspiciously at Alban, who, to do him justice, did not seem in the faintest degree discomposed in his turn.

"Mr. Brand," called Regina, following him to the head of the stairs, "consult Miss Hopper about it. There is matter for at least a dozen visits in the breadth of that one flannel stole!"

Mr. Brand's "Too bad, Miss Howard!" faintly ascended the stairs.

"Ah, Regina!" cried Mrs. Willingham, archly, as she returned to the room, "Mr. Brand is such a favourite of mine that I will not let you ill-use him!"

"I could not, if I wished it, dear Mrs. Willingham," said Regina; "I don't think honest people have the power to do harm."

"Granny looks quite flushed and uncomfortable!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham. "I shall have a little private chat with her, while you take Alban into the garden, and give him a lecture on yellow carnations."

"Will you come?" asked Regina going to the window, from which a flight of steps led down into the flower-garden.

"We are turned out, it seems," he replied, as he followed her.

"What is it, granny?" asked Mrs. Willingham.

"My dear, I am puzzled about Mr. Brand," replied the old lady; "he begins to come here

rather too much. You see my little Regina was always a child; but, lately, she seems to grow up, and you know that neighbours are very ready to talk. I feel sure that he is not paying her his addresses, and her feelings to him are but friendly; still this will not appear to our friends, and it will do her no service that their names are coupled together."

"People will talk, granny—let them!" said Mrs. Willingham endearingly; "in my opinion, it serves Mr. Brand quite right for acting in a way that might mislead any young girl: much as I like him, I have no patience with the man."

"I should have less," returned Mrs. Arnold smiling, "if I did not feel quite sure of my little Regina's heart; but I am afraid that will be touched only through her imagination, and Mr. Brand's good qualities are not of the order to captivate a whimsical temperament—half child, half artist."

"You have described her exactly, granny; put Mr. Brand entirely out of your head. Besides, I have a better match in view for my favourite."

"You, my dear!"

Mrs. Willingham leaned towards the open window.

"Yes; look at them, granny."

They were standing on the grass-plat, close to one of the flower-beds—Alban had some roses in his hand, and Regina was mockingly refusing them, with that little bird-like gesture of the head that made her look so capricious and tantalizing. He held them steadily towards her—she clasped her hands behind her; he strewed them at her feet—and then she suddenly darted across the lawn, and flew as if her feet had wings up the steps into the drawing-room. Alban turned and looked after her with his momentary smile, and then slowly followed.

"What is all this closeting and whispering? I *will* know, granny! I won't be kept out," cried Regina.

"We don't want you; take your knitting, and sit under the mulberry-tree!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham, playfully throwing her a cambric handkerchief, half embroidered, that lay on the table.

"I'll not stir! you shall not bribe me into good-humour with a handkerchief, like Iago," cried Regina, assuming a tragic attitude; "I know it is something about Winny Hopper."

"It is not, indeed, Regina; I wonder, Alban, that you cannot manage to keep this perverse child out of my way."

"Come, then," he said, "if the conference is not ended"—just as he would have spoken to a child. Regina gave him a little mutinous look, and stood still.

"But I think, my dear, we have quite done," said Mrs. Arnold, gently.

"Done!—oh, you naughty granny! when we had not even made a beginning."

"I'm quite puzzled, my dear," said Mrs. Arnold; while Alban quietly took up the cambric and the little ivory work-box beside it, and walked off to the seat under the mulberry-tree.

"Go, Regina! he will destroy your thread, and scissors, and every thing, if you don't get them out of his hands. Men always do," laughed Mrs. Willingham.

Regina ran down the steps to claim her property. "And now, granny, I don't know how to begin," said Mrs. Willingham; "stay—the plainest way is always the best. My Alban loves your little Regina. That does not surprise you—does it?" Yes, it did surprise her so much as to deprive her of words. Things perfectly obvious, that occur under our very eyes, always do surprise us in this manner.

"You see, my granny," she pursued, in her low coaxing voice, "Alban would say nothing to her till he had learned your sentiments. He is too honourable; but he has loved her—oh! ever since last year. It seems perfectly natural to me; it could not well be otherwise. I think she must like him just a little; don't you? He is perfect—he is, indeed, granny; he is truth itself. He would not do any thing he considered wrong, or even *unfit* (if you understand me), for all the world could offer. Except his pride, which I own I think a merit, he has not one single fault. And then, though he is poor now, yet Beyminstre *must* come to him, it is so strictly entailed. He will

have fourteen thousand a year and the baronetcy. And, granny, you *must* say—yes!"

"My dear! I am very much flattered and charmed, but I cannot say *yes* for a long time to come," replied Mrs. Arnold, collecting her ideas; "your son's prospects are so much above——"

"Not above her merit or her beauty," cried Mrs. Willingham impetuously; "or her birth either, if you come to that."

"So much above her position," continued Mrs. Arnold gently, "that it must take some time for your son to convince himself that he would be content to select his wife from such a retired and moderate condition of life."

"Alban will never change," said Mrs. Willingham: "that is another quality which *I* admire; but some people might think him almost *too* firm."

"My dear! all I have heard and seen of him, leads me to rejoice in the thought of intrusting my child to his care. But you must let us have our pride, too, dear Mrs. Willingham. Your son is young. You must let us feel that we have not sought to fetter him so early in his career. Every

year will add to his knowledge of the world, and his sense of what he might reasonably expect in an alliance. Let him put aside this idea for the present; I am sure, Regina is quite unconscious of any such thought, and you know she is but sixteen, my dear; there is no hurry."

"But you like it, and you wish it, and you will let him visit here, granny?"

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear."

"And as for the rest—oh! here she comes again, and I have not said half: no matter, another time will do."

CHAPTER XII.

So Alban was expected at Holmwood every day as a matter of course: soon expected by Regina quite as much as by Mrs. Arnold. Sometimes his mother came with him, but oftener he walked over to arrange plans for their meeting in the evening either there or at Dykeham.

He would often beg Regina to sing, but he never praised her. Not all her little devices could draw forth another such compliment as he had paid her that moonlight night on the common.

"Do I sing worse than I did last year?" she asked, half pettishly, one day as she rose from the piano; vexed at the calm "Thank you!" with which he had as usual rewarded her efforts.

"No; better, I think!" he replied calmly; she dropped into a low chair, and took up her netting.

"After all, if you did not like it, you would not go on asking me," she said; "and so, by making a rule of three sum of it, we may come to the conclusion that it is not disagreeable to you."

But he only smiled, and made no answer.

His manner perplexed her more and more every day. Often, when he had taken leave, she longed to speak to her grandmama, and beg that she would prevent him from coming again; and then she was deterred, by not knowing how to enter upon the subject.

One morning she was particularly out of spirits. It had rained all the day before; and the damp grass and steaming juniper bushes on the common in front, had a certain depressing influence on her feelings. And then Alban had not come all day, and, though this was the very thing she so often wished, yet she felt his absence like a weight on her heart. It is true that a little note at night, which ought to have been delivered in the morning, enlightened her as to the cause of his non-appearance; but this, I am sorry to say, made her cross; because, as she argued, it could not possibly

matter to her why he stayed at Dykeham instead of loitering his morning at Holmwood.

"I am very selfish (Mrs. Willingham wrote) to keep Alban here, when I know he wishes to be at Holmwood; but I am suffering to day with my horrid spasms, which always give me a feeling of dread; and I am more easy when I frighten him as well as myself: so, forgive me till to-morrow.

"R. Willingham."

And the next morning, which was a perfect blaze of summer beauty, Regina sat eagerly listening for every footstep, and was rewarded about noon by seeing Mrs. Ramsay's carriage drive up to the door, and that large lady alight, followed by the merry Miss Hopper. Mrs. Arnold was visiting a poor neighbour, at which Regina rejoiced; for she knew that guests of this kind were very apt to fatigue her grandmama. Mrs. Ramsay was at once so condescending, and so little at her ease, that it was difficult to talk to her; and a feeling of constraint, like a nightmare, used to

come over Regina in her great presence. Though it may be urged in Mrs. Ramsay's defence, that there are very few persons who have any idea of the first principles of conversation—of adapting the tone of their discourse to the occasion.

In vain Regina remarked on the rain, on the corn, on the shew of wall-fruit, on Mr. Miller's illness, and on the accident that happened last week in the hay-field—she came to a stand at last; the more completely, as Mrs. Ramsay contradicted all she said angrily, like one convinced and indignant that she was telling falsehoods.

Thus Mrs. Ramsay insisted that it had not rained *much* yesterday—that is, not much for a thunder shower; then she *wondered* how Mrs. Arnold came to have so many apricots, for all she knew was that she had next to none, and she *believed* that her gardeners, all three, were tolerably clever in their business. Oh dear! no; poor Mr. Miller was not at all better—far from it! at least that was the reply given to *her* inquiries, and she could not think how it was that Mrs. Arnold had

received a different answer; and the man in the hay-field who had stepped on the scythe, did it on *Toosday* (for so she pronounced the day sacred to Mars), and not on Wednesday, as Regina had declared. Regina having been thus convicted of perjury on every count of the indictment, thought it more prudent to be silent, and at least to leave the choice of topics to her guest.

"But our object to-day," pursued Mrs. Ramsay, with a sidelong movement of her large head towards Winny, was to congratulate you, my dear —a very excellent young man; and I'm sure I hope you may be happy."

Regina's whole face became crimson.

"Rather nervous just at first, talking it over," cried Winny, screwing up her eyes. "Mr. Brand puts a bolder face upon the matter."

"Mr. Brand!" echoed Regina, looking very much relieved.

"You are very fortunate, my dear," quoth Mrs. Ramsay, looking grandly down upon the slender Regina; "I hope you may make a valuable, hard-working curate's wife. Mr. Brand, I know, has

nothing at present—quite a beggar, if one might apply such a term to a clergyman."

"Ecclesiastic?" suggested Miss Hopper.

"But what I was about to say," pursued Mrs. Ramsay, not venturing on so long a word as that supplied by her friend, "I hope he may get some preferment sooner or later, and they are both young enough to wait, Miss Hopper."

"To be sure! and it is so delightful, after trying so very much, to succeed at last," added Winny; "isn't it, Regina?"

"And now I hope she will steady into a good notable housewife," cried Mrs. Ramsay; "all the little attempts at music and painting, and all that sort of thing, laid aside for sewing, marketing, and household arithmetic."

"Regina will soon be quite a ready reckoner," squeaked Winny.

"And that good creature you have about you by way of a cook, the stout woman—Becky, I think you call her—can put you in the way of a good many useful things, such as preserving, and making hashes," added Mrs. Ramsay.

"Only I am not going to marry Mr. Brand," said Regina carelessly.

"You have not refused him?"

"No! but I am not going to marry so many people, whom I have not refused either."

"Ah! you see we are a little premature; it is not talked about yet," remarked Mrs. Ramsay turning to Miss Hopper. "But what *you* have told me is quite enough." Then, getting up slowly, she added, "I shall give you something useful, my dear, towards housekeeping; no foolish ornamental trifles, but a solid flour-tub and rolling-pin, that Mr. Ramsay bought at a sale not long ago; and Mrs. Chillingworth means to do just the same. She even talked of a kitchen range; but her purse is longer than mine, and in these bad times every one must cut his coat according to his cloth."

"As I am not likely to put my friends' generosity to the test," said Regina coldly, "I will keep my gratitude till it is needed."

"Must not be impatient, Regina," cried Winny; "time will pass. And I think I would go to church

early on saints' days if I were you. It would so please Mr. Brand!"

"As it is not my object to please Mr. Brand, I shall leave the early service to you and the pew-opener, Miss Hopper," said Regina.

"We must not keep the carriage waiting!" exclaimed Mrs. Ramsay; "Anthony will not bear it, nor Roberts either. I always say my servants are the most despotic of human beings! Good-by, my dear. Regards to Mrs. Arnold. We never meet now, somehow or other."

Regina made a heroic effort, and consigned her slender fingers to the pressure of the broad palm extended towards her. Winny blinked and giggled, and the guests took their welcome leave.

"It is well they are gone!" exclaimed Regina, throwing herself back on her chair. "I could not have been civil a moment longer: I should certainly have exploded, and said things they would never have forgotten. Such insolence! as if I could even *think* of Mr. Brand! It is well they never hinted at—at another person. I could not have borne to be accused of attentions I have

never received, and which *he* has no idea of paying. And their charitable offerings, too!—a kitchen range!—to me!—because I am poor. Does it not almost make one wish for any lot that would bring these creatures to one's feet. I might tread on her neck if I had but twice her fortune, and she would let me, and thank me too! As for the other, she is not worth thinking about, not worth treading upon."

But for all that she walked to the window, and stood wiping the indignant tears from her eyes.

"In tears? Why, what is the matter? I never saw you cry before!" exclaimed Alban, entering with one of his mother's twisted notes.

"And you would not have seen me now if I could have got out of the way," answered Regina; "I hate to be seen crying."

"Naturally," he replied; "but what is it?"

"Something disagreeable that Mrs. Ramsay and Winny Hopper have been saying to me. I need not say that it is all Winny's doing."

"Winny is an old ferret! but don't cry, Regina," he said, coming up to the table.

Mrs. Willingham had laughed him out of saying Miss Howard, but he had never used her name before.

"I've done now," she replied, colouring and smiling; "is that note for grandmama? I will give it to her when she returns."

"It is merely to beg Mrs. Arnold to take compassion on my mother, and drink tea with her, with you of course. *Don't* cry, Regina!"

"I don't, Mr. Willingham," she replied; but still the tears came stealing to the ends of her long eyelashes, and were dashed away impatiently with the back of her hand.

"What is it that has vexed you? I have a right to know—I would do any thing to set your mind at rest. I love nothing so well as you Regina—not even my mother!"

There was a breathless pause: she suffered her hand to remain in his, and her eyes were fixed on the ground, but Alban was satisfied. He knew that she would not have left him in suspense the tenth part of a second, if she had been indifferent to his suit.

"Well, after all, what is the grievance?" he asked, as he led her to a seat.

"Something impertinent that Winny said about me and Mr. Brand; which had no foundation but in her own jealousy."

"Oh! I understand."

"And then Mrs. Ramsay offered me a flour-tub, and said a great many rude things reflecting on my poverty."

"One day, Regina—you—you know what I mean—you will be placed as far above these Hoppers and Ramsays in wealth and social position, as you are in every thing besides."

It was the very echo of the thought that had crossed her mind when stung by their paltry sneers, but now she shrank from it as from the shadow of a sin.

"Oh! Alban, stop!" she cried; "don't let me think your prospects have any thing to do with my feelings; don't suggest to me what my pride is too ready to whisper! My future is bright enough, believe it, without Beyminstre!"

"Do you know, Regina," he said, "I am some-

times half afraid that you will melt away altogether into thin air, you look so spiritual? I believe you are the noblest creature that ever existed, and your future *shall* be bright, if I can make it so."

"And you must not depend too much on Beyminstre," urged Regina; "you know Sir Herbert may marry."

"He marry! a woman like my mother is not so easily replaced!"

"You know well I think no one can compare with Mrs. Willingham; but—people marry for so many reasons."

"I *know* Sir Herbert won't marry!" replied Alban decidedly, "and every stick of Beyminstre is entailed. What can he do against me, let him try his utmost? He can't live for ever."

"Suppose he were to cut off the entail?"

"Simpleton!" said Alban, with his brief smile, "he cannot do that without the consent of the next heir, that is, myself. The only question is, Regina, how long we are to wait, and that we cannot tell."

"Poor man! I think you ought to pity him."

"So I do pity him extremely; but I must say he need not carry his resentment so far. My mother preferred his brother to himself, unfortunate every way; but, if a disappointment is to embitter a man's whole life, I must say he is a poor creature."

"Alban!"

"Don't look so indignant; Regina, I am beginning to feel for him. I'll be sorry for any one you please—for Mr. Brand, if you think it necessary."

"Oh, no!" she replied, laughing; "I am happy to say that Mr. Brand's woes exist only in Miss Hopper's imagination."

"These silly hasty young folks have settled it all to their satisfaction, it seems," remarked Mrs. Willingham that evening, when they were all sauntering up and down the quaint old garden after tea.

"Nothing is to be even thought of at present in the way of settling," said Mrs. Arnold, earnestly.

"No—not until we can be Lady Willingham of Beyminstre, it seems," laughed Mrs. Willingham, stroking Regina's polished hair as she spoke.

"I imagine that no one here expects me to wait for that," cried Alban.

"'Patience is a good horse, but he will tire!'" quoted Mrs. Willingham.

"Still, my dear young friend," urged Mrs. Arnold, "you must be a little older, and Regina too, before I shall be at all convinced that either of you know your own mind."

"Regina will know her own mind when she sees Beyminstre," said Mrs. Willingham. "Such a lovely place! so grey and gothic—with such delightful mullioned windows! Oh! how many years have passed since I was there!"

"The only fault is the conservatory which joins the right wing," said Alban; "it spoils the outline of the building."

"But how pleasant!" cried Regina.

"Yes, in a cottage; but in a house of that character you should consult the outline above

every thing; people of condition cannot coil themselves up in their comforts like a *roturier*."

"That is Alban!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham; "you see, my dear Regina, the sort of person you venture upon!"

"What is the derivation of the name?" asked Mrs. Arnold.

"You, who are learned, dear granny, know that a minster is a church served by monastic clergy. The old priory of Beyminstre was close to such a church—(By the Minster.) The said minster has become the village church, and the house is in fact the old priory, repaired and converted into a dwelling."

The evening passed only too quickly for Regina—she was in a happy dream. Alban was so different from what he had been. So many little phrases seemed to have a meaning now which she dared not interpret before. As he wrapped her shawl carefully about her throat before escorting her home, she exulted in hearing him say—

"You must not take cold, and spoil your beau-

tiful voice, which I never praise, because I cannot praise it enough."

How keenly she appreciated his never saying these things before—until he felt that he had a right to say them, and she to hear them, without embarrassment!

It was a lovely mild night, a faint starlight in the sky, and a heavy dew spangling the fields and hedges. The bats were wheeling across their path, and the chirp of the grasshoppers rose like a chorus on every side. And now a break in the hazel thicket disclosed a clear narrow stream, gliding with scarcely a ripple past the thick drooping boughs of the nut-trees fringing the bank. They paused a minute to look at the dark cool water, and a swan came sailing by with its young cygnet on its back, seated between its high sheltering wings; and, as they gazed and lingered, absorbed in the quiet beauty of the scene, a grey wasted figure followed in their track, watching their unconscious movements, and straining to catch every word they let fall.

CHAPTER XIII.

But it is not a very common thing (in this part of the world at least) for happiness to last for ever. Regina knew that there must be a cloud upon her's, for she was aware that Alban would soon have to return to Scotland; but she was not quite prepared for what was coming. His regiment was ordered suddenly to India, and to the Affghan country, where the first dreadful news of our reverses had just reached England. If their marriage had even been agreed upon, this would not have been a time for it to take place. The capture of so many English ladies, who had persisted in going where it did not seem very wise to those at home that they should ever have been permitted to go, was a sufficient warning against taking out any more for the present; and Mrs.

Arnold was decidedly against a marriage, or even an engagement between them, taking place so early. She repeated what she had at first said, that Alban's prospects entitled him to look higher than her grandchild, and that she would not permit him to leave the country fettered by a tie which, however his sentiments might alter, he could not but find it difficult to break. Alban listened to this decision with calm politeness. Having made up his mind to marry Regina as soon as he could offer her a home, and feeling quite convinced that he could not take her among the Sikhs, he allowed Mrs. Arnold to make all the remarks she pleased on the subject, respected her scruples, and quietly thought over his future plans. These all centred in Beyminstre; he was never weary of describing to Regina the house and the grounds, and picturing the time when she would have an equal interest in the place.

Regina used sometimes to endeavour gently to lead his thoughts from Beyminstre.

"If any thing should happen," she urged; "if by some turn in the future, that we cannot

foresee or imagine, Beyminstre should not be yours."

"Say *ours*, Regina," he interposed.

"*Ours*, then—I dread to think of your disappointment."

"So do I, Regina; my heart is set upon it. I won't say my *whole* heart; but, let me turn and twist the future as I will, I see nothing, absolutely nothing, that can prevent my having it."

"But, Alban, what unforeseen things happen constantly. Who would ever have thought that you would be going to India, and so soon?"

And her eyes began filling with tears.

"Well then, my Regina, we will not speculate on Beyminstre; one thing I have never done, and never will do, and that is—to borrow money on the strength of my succession."

"Of course not!" she exclaimed confidently.

Alban smiled: he had been so very often recommended to do so by people quite as good as the average, and was thought so very stupid for not doing so by those of his acquaintance who would not have hesitated a moment themselves, that he

felt some right to be commended for his forbearance, and was rather amused by her assuming that he could not act otherwise.

"We must be moderate in our ideas, that is all," pursued Regina. "We shall not be so very miserable; people who are not greedy can live on so little. I only wish, in case of the worst, that I had a large fortune instead of a very little one."

"Don't wish that, Regina! I could not exist a day—I, a poor man—on my wife's fortune, eating her bread, wearing her clothes, riding her horses—I declare I know nothing so base. People do it, and look you in the face, but I wonder at their assurance. I am all for the Turks, who buy their wives instead of selling themselves."

"If they bought but one, Alban."

"I grant you that, Regina; if they could buy such a one as I have in view."

"Still I am not to be bought, let me tell you!" she added more gaily.

"And yet it is very fit that you should set a high price upon yourself," he replied in the same tone.

He never for a moment adopted Mrs. Arnold's view of his position with Regina—he did not choose to be free.

"We understand each other," he remarked; "we are affianced. I have the highest regard for Mrs. Arnold's feelings; they have all the delicacy which you can expect to find only in a lady of ancient birth; but, with my sentiments, it is absurd to talk of being unfettered. I suppose you do not think that *I* am very likely to change; and, young as you are, I give you credit for as much constancy on your side."

Regina thought and felt with him, but she was reserved in expressing her feelings; so anxious was she not even to seem eager for Beyminstre, and so scrupulous a watch did she keep over that corner of her heart in which she knew there was a half-developed love of rank and splendour.

As for poor Mrs. Willingham, her spirits went down at once and altogether. Her head drooped; her voice was changed in tone. You would have thought she was coming out of a long and dangerous illness; she spent all her time when alone, in

poring over a large folding map of India that her son had brought her; tracing over and over again the different names to which so terrible a notoriety had been recently given. Even the tender-hearted Mrs. Arnold, who, when she was in better circumstances, had been sought far and near as a comforter—who had succeeded in consoling Mrs. Ramsay when she lost her twins in the measles, (Regina always did say that a large basket of the October peaches, for which the rectory was famous, materially assisted her grandmama's soothing powers,)—Mrs. Arnold, who was the good genius of the house of Chillingworth when the eldest son nearly killed himself out shooting—and who had quite kept up Mrs. Miller's spirits during the Catholic question, when that lady had put on mourning for the departed religion of the realm—even Mrs. Arnold broke her wand in despair, and trusted to Time, as people do when they have nothing else to trust to. For that gentle-voiced and delicate-minded lady had perceptions granted to very few, and a genius for sympathy that rendered her attempts different,

according to the sort of person she had occasion to address. She knew that when she had told Mrs. Ramsay it was the will of God her children should die, and that it was our duty to bow to His decrees, that good lady had accepted her remarks as perfectly new, and naturally very cheering additions to her limited stock of ideas. But she thought it probable that Mrs. Willingham had heard these things before—that she knew and felt them; and that yet, without being quite a heathen, they did not in the slightest degree alter the fact, that she was about to lose her son, and that her very soul was seared with the conviction that she should never, never see him again. All this distress was so new to Regina, that she could hardly tell what she felt. She had yet to serve an apprenticeship to sorrow. She had lost her parents too early to grieve over their death. She had not experienced that worse absence, that restless daily loss which time has no power to alleviate, which those endure whose dearest friends are stationed in a fatal climate. She did her best to animate and console Mrs. Willingham

—she sympathized with her fully and freely; but she did not feel as much, and that is the truth. She thought sincerely that nobody ever was so distressed as herself; but, after all, the love of kindred (where it *is* love and not the opposite) is the strongest of the affections. The Greek woman was right who saved her brother instead of her husband; she said she *might* (and how very often people *do*) get another husband, but how was she to replace her brother's loss?

But still she was very unhappy, and very much to be pitied. And Winny Hopper could scarcely sleep for wondering what made her look so deadly pale, now that she had secured Mr. Brand. She gave Alban a long tress of her shining hair, and he gave her a ring—an opal, which he pretended was a talisman—and the nearer the time drew for his departure, the more she felt as if she could not live through the last few hours—the worst, as all know who have gone through such a trial.

It was settled that they should all spend the last evening at Dykeham. Mrs. Arnold went

early in the fly, leaving Alban and Regina to walk across the common at their leisure. The weather was mild and cloudy. A ray of the declining sun quivered on the lower branches of the oaks, the rest were black with shadow. They stood, arm-in-arm, looking at the trees before them, with very little idea of the beautiful effect of light and shade which they presented at that moment, but rather to prolong the time that they would pass together.

"I leave my mother in your care, Regina," he said at last; "you will be more to her than I could ever be."

"I will do my best, Alban," she returned; "you can hardly love her more than I do."

"When I write to her, you will understand that I am speaking to you in every line."

"Yes! she has promised that I shall see all your letters, and all her answers."

"You might write a few lines at the end of her's sometimes."

"If grandmama allows it; but you know she is fastidious about our position. Still, if I do not

write I shall dictate. We shall hear constantly of each other."

"I should be glad if I could form an idea when I shall stand on this spot with you again, Regina; it is true there is one event that would recall me at once—I mean Sir Herbert's death."

"Oh! then, we won't look forward to it," cried Regina; "I could not bear to think of profiting by—Dear me! I hope that old man did not hear us. He passed quite close as you were speaking."

"That's the old man who lives on the common, is it not?"

"Yes, and Mrs. Willingham thinks he has something to do with Sir Herbert—that he was once in his service."

"Ah! however, he could do me no harm, even if he were to repeat what I said. Sir Herbert would have every disposition to injure me, but it is not in his power."

"Perhaps we had better go on," said Regina; "Mrs. Willingham will not like to lose much of your company."

"Now," he said, pausing as they came up to

the gate of the farm-house, "have we any thing else to say?"

"No, I think not," she answered faintly.

He bent forward and kissed her gravely, and then led her into the house.

Regina had her share of sorrows in after life, but she always recollected that evening as the most especially wretched she could call to mind. It was not like a death in the house. Nobody was supposed to be overwhelmed—nobody felt they had a right to give way to grief—nobody had courage to approach the subject that was in their thoughts, almost upon their lips. She said afterwards, that the strain on her nerves made her feel ten years older. Even Alban, whose composure was wont to act upon her like a spell—even his calmness was so visibly assumed, that she feared every minute it would be overthrown.

Once only he touched upon his destination, and then, to Regina's surprise, who gave up all for lost, his mother was able to command her feelings. He was sitting beside Regina, who was preparing the tea; and Mrs. Willingham, on the other side

of the table, was looking at him, half unconsciously, with an expression of utter misery in her countenance.

"Ah! you are thinking of the Khyber Pass," he said, wishing to rouse her from her depression; "but we are going to change all that, like Molière's physician."

Mrs. Willingham rose up with a gasp, but she recovered herself as she came slowly across the room, and she replied, while she leaned on his shoulder, "No! I was thinking that there was a window open behind my little Regina, and that it was not very safe after her walk."

"Don't shut it, pray!" exclaimed Regina, glad of a window to talk about; "I am so fond of air, and it is very close this evening."

"It is oppressive," sighed poor Mrs. Willingham. There was something to do while the tea-things were before her, and Regina was thankful for the occupation; she dared not raise her eyes; she felt as if each long minute would exhaust her courage. And very soon afterwards Mrs. Arnold's fly was heard approaching.

"Going so early, my dear, dear friend?" cried Mrs. Willingham, clinging to the old lady as if, while she remained, her son's departure was less near.

"Yes, my dear!" she replied; "these last hours belong to you alone; and, for my little Regina, parting is as easy now as later—easier, perhaps: so God bless you both, and comfort you in these dark trials!"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Willingham with feverish haste. "Dear Mrs. Arnold! you have done me a great deal of good already. She was talking to me, Alban, before you came in; and she said what is very true—that—that——"

And here poor Mrs. Willingham burst into a sudden paroxysm of hysterical weeping, and Regina, scarcely less agitated, threw herself into her arms.

"Now, my dear Alban," said Mrs. Arnold, taking him aside, "your mother will be better when alone. Bid farewell to my child, as friends who will rejoice to meet again, but who have no claim, no pledge, between them."

They clasped each other's hands, while their eyes met, expressing all the faith and constancy they were not allowed to put into words.

Which of them was the first to break that silent vow?

CHAPTER XIV.

Even Mrs. Arnold could hardly understand her friend's passionate despair when her son was gone. All the agony which she had compressed within herself while he remained, now seemed to defy restraint, and overwhelmed her like a sea. Her health was no longer strong enough to permit her to wrestle against her sorrow.

All that Regina's naturally hopeful temper could urge in behalf of Alban's safety, his success, his speedy return, she put aside by the single remark—

"You, my love, can keep up, for you will see him again—I shall not! It is not his death that I see approaching: it is my own!"

In vain did Regina attempt to scare this phantom from her path; it soon became too

evident to herself and her grandmama that Mrs. Willingham's strength was declining. Her spasms became more frequent and more alarming; and, as the autumn set in early and cold, a racking cough was added to her other ailments.

Mrs. Arnold much wished that she would take up her abode with them altogether at Holmwood; but this she declined.

"I am trouble enough to you, granny, as it is," she said; "and my little Regina turns as white as a sheet when the spasms come on: invalids are better alone the greater part of their time—though, if I grow much worse—I don't know—we shall see."

Mrs. Arnold had gone through it all before; she had watched the symptoms of decline in her own daughter. It opened a new scene to Regina, and she began to understand the heart-sickness of alternate hope and fear.

It was during the winter of that year that Mrs. Arnold received an unexpected bequest from a distant relative in France. The Count Du Quesnay, who was a Laval on his mother's side,

bequeathed to Mrs. Arnold a property worth about eight hundred a year. This fortune, which, to the simple tastes of the old lady, appeared very ample, she determined to set apart for Regina, in order that there might be no pecuniary difficulties in the way of her marriage with Alban, as soon as he was able to return from India.

Regina was half afraid that Alban would think her too rich if she was endowed so splendidly, but Mrs. Willingham laughed her out of that notion.

"It will make very pretty pin-money for Lady Willingham, my love, and nothing more; and I advise you to have it all very closely tied up and settled on yourself, for there is no knowing how people may turn out. I am serious; he is very like his father about the nose!"

Alban wrote long letters at every possible opportunity; he knew that his mother would be interested by details, and he gave her minute accounts of every thing that passed in which he took a share. Very few people in England possessed the knowledge of Indian affairs that Mrs. Willingham attained in the course of that winter

It was her daily solace to look over all her son's letters, even when they had swelled into a formidable collection, and to trace his progress on the map. She bought a quantity of sketches of India, and when she could sit up, employed herself in colouring them—like Adrienne de Cardoville, she bought every book of travels or personal narratives that bore on the title-page any reference to our empire in the east; and Regina read them out to her while she painted her lithographs, or copied the engravings from such of the works as were illustrated.

One cold morning Regina was walking across the common to pay her daily visit at Dykeham, for the fields were wet, and she was obliged to keep to the high-road, when a large carriage rolled past her, in which to her surprise she beheld Mrs. Chillingworth and Miss Hopper, seated in close converse. Time had been when Winny thought it a great move to be taken out *riding*, as she called it, by Mrs. Ramsay; and her grandmother had had some difficulty in obtaining Mrs. Chillingworth's permission to introduce the grateful Winny to her at a Bible meeting held at Bradford.

Then she had been asked to tea, when they were obliged to have a few people whom they looked down upon; and then she taught the children a new way of playing at dominoes; and then they had her to dine when the Ramsays were asked, that she might be the recipient of all Mrs. Ramsay's tiresome boastings; and at last she had wriggled herself into a confidential intimacy with Mrs. Chillingworth, and of course looked into the hedge when they drew past Regina, that she might not be compelled to acknowledge her inferiors with a bow.

Regina had only just time to feel gratified that she was not obliged to speak to Miss Hopper when the carriage was suddenly checked, and Mrs. Chillingworth leaning out, said—

"Ah! how are you, Regina? you are just the person I wanted to see; you can tell us where Mr. Brand is going."

"Mr. Brand! I did not know he was going any where," said Regina, looking surprised.

"Yes!" cried Winny, chinking up her eyes. "He has much to learn, poor young man! He

cannot be brought to see with Mr. Morley on several great subjects, and he has got another curacy—but where is it?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Regina.

"Then you may depend on it he does not know himself," remarked Mrs. Chillingworth; "for of course you would be the first to hear."

"Unless they have quarrelled," hinted Winny, looking very wise.

"You gave him to me, Miss Hopper," said Regina; "you are quite at liberty to take him away again when you please."

Mrs. Chillingworth, finding that Regina knew nothing about it, gave orders to drive on, and Regina pursued her way, not a little vexed at hearing that the only clergyman with whom they were on cordial terms was about to leave the parish. A little farther on she met Mr. Brand coming out of a cottage, and so very certain did she feel of her feelings towards him, and of his to her, that she had no hesitation at expressing her regret in the prospect of losing him.

"I'm sure I don't wonder at your going!" she

exclaimed; "I should like to know who would stay with Mr. Morley (daughters included) if they could get away; only it *is* a little hard for grandmama to have no one to speak to about her charities, or any thing; and you know it is made a crime at headquarters to give away a loaf of bread with your right hand, if he fancies you should give it with your left."

"Oh, Miss Howard!" said Mr. Brand, looking very much pleased, however; "but (I do not know who was your informant) I have no present intention of leaving Holmwood."

"Oh, that's well!—it was Winny, of course; but never mind!" exclaimed Regina.

Mr. Brand laughed, and went on—"It is possible that Miss Hopper may have heard whispers of a change in the church at Holmwood; but (I know I can trust you, Miss Howard) it is not I who am likely to leave—it is Mr. Morley. Three of his intimate friends have become converts—I will not use the abusive term *perverts*—to the Roman Catholic faith, and they have so worked upon him, that I believe in a very short time he

will also make his profession. As I learn that my services are still required by his successor, I see no immediate prospect of my leaving this place."

"For which I am very glad, and for all the rest," cried Regina. "Will he be a monk? will he take orders? what will he do with his daughters? I think I should like him best as a Benedictine, or a Carmelite—which is the strictest profession, Mr. Brand?"

"I am afraid, Miss Howard, that you will not have the gratification of hearing that he has taken the tonsure; it is said that a young lady of large fortune, whose views have gradually progressed with his own, until she has ended, as he has done, at Rome——"

"From Oxford to Rome, Mr. Brand!" said Regina, archly; "and the young lady's name is Miss Cutler, Mr. Brand—and she has fifty thousand pounds; and Miss Hopper will be *disconsolate*, Mr. Brand, but not *inconsolable*—I trust I need say no more."

"Now really, Miss Howard, you are too bad!" he replied, laughing, as he took his leave.

Mrs. Arnold was so very much relieved by Mr. Morley's departure, which took place within a week after this conversation, that Regina told Mrs. Willingham privately, she could not bring herself to regret the cause of this effect—or rather say, "the cause of this *de*-fect;" which quotation Mrs. Willingham thought so witty, that, being then engaged in writing to Alban, she introduced it for his especial benefit.

And Mr. Brand, though he respected the sincerity of Mr. Morley's conduct, began to think you might have too much of a good thing; and the candles disappeared from the altar, and the beadle was no longer directed to put water slily into the aspersorium at the church door; nay, he even discontinued the early service at a hint from his present rector, who thought it hardly worth while to open the church for the sake of two angry old women and the parish idiot, who had hitherto formed the sole congregation, led thither by the threats of Mr. Morley. The new rector went even farther, and preached in his black gown, partly because such had been the practice within

the memory of man in this country, and partly because other changes of costume being recommended, and not followed even by the most zealous Puseyites (such as the adoption of the cope), he did not see why he should wrong himself and others by doing things by halves.

And Regina performed her promise the very first Sunday Mr. Brand followed this example, and executed a sketch of him the next morning in his black robe going up the pulpit stairs; but, being taken from behind, it was not so valuable to his friends as it might have been, since it only illustrated the back of his head, and the scroll of paper in his hand.

But Mrs. Willingham was delighted with it, and reproached her young friend for not having made such another clever sketch of Alban when he was so much there—"So many opportunities as you had, naughty Regina! and, with your knack of seizing the expression of the figure, it was too bad."

And then Regina felt shy, and did not tell Mrs. Willingham that she had made a sketch of Alban,

the very best she had ever done; and that she looked at it the last thing at night, and the first thing every morning, and that she never had courage to show it even to her grandmama.

As the spring advanced, and it became only too clear that Mrs. Willingham was rapidly declining, a singular change took place in her own feelings. She became every day more sanguine of her recovery. Each symptom that spoke so plainly of decay to her experienced friend, she treated as accidental. Now, it was the east wind that had aggravated her cough—another time, an imprudent diet had brought on a severer fit of spasms. The doctor seriously advised that some one should write to her son, and she took this duty on herself, and wrote a laughing account of the fears her kind friends entertained for her health. Regina was sitting by her at the time, and she felt that Alban could come but to one conclusion on receiving that letter—that his mother was particularly well, and that Mrs. Arnold was a very nervous old woman. So, after thinking over the subject a great deal, Regina took the law into her

own hands, and the first time she was alone she sent Alban the following lines, remarkable only as being the first and last letter she ever addressed to a lover:—

"It is very painful to me to write to you on a subject that will give you much sorrow; but I am sure, if you knew how very weak my dear Mrs. Willingham has become lately, you would, if possible, return to England without delay. Her spirits are so good, owing, I think, to your cheering letters, that she will not believe her strength is decreasing, and that we have reason for our deep anxiety. I am writing without the leave or knowledge of any one, just because I could not keep silent, and therefore you must not send me an answer; but, if you come, you will find me the same exactly as when you left. Ah! what would I give, that you could find all who are dear to you as little changed!

"Regina Howard."

And now they were come to May—cruel, biting,

noxious May—whose chilling rains and piercing winds bring many a lingering illness to its close. Mrs. Willingham never left the house now; she rose late, and went to bed at twilight. A regular nurse sat with her through the night, and she was obliged to take opiates to secure her any sleep.

Mrs. Arnold and Regina divided the day between them at Dykeham—the old lady sitting with the invalid through the morning, and Regina passing the evening with her from her early tea till she was settled for the night. The afternoon she always insisted on passing by herself.

How much Regina had to tell her grandmother after their few hours' separation—how much variety of pain to comment upon, and learn how to alleviate; for Mrs. Arnold was suggestive in a sick room, and without that quality people are better away. But no amount of kind sympathy or ready invention could long avail their patient; it was evident that she was sinking fast. Now came long hours of faintness and depression, when the old belief, that she should never see her son again, was strong upon her; and at other times

she was all hope and anticipation, and racked Regina's heart by dwelling on all the happiness that awaited her as soon as the war was over, and Alban could return to England. She gladly welcomed the visits of Mr. Carter, the rector of Dykeham, and received the sacrament at his hands; remarking that, until she could go to church again, it was a great comfort to her to have the services performed at home; but it did not strike her, as it did Mrs. Arnold and Regina, who were with her, that the time would never come that she would enter a church again.

At last, towards the end of May, one morning that Regina was expecting Mrs. Arnold back to dinner, there came a slip of paper from that lady to say, that her dear friend was so much worse as to induce her to remain, at least during the day, and promising to let Regina know every few hours how the invalid was going on. But the idea of waiting at Holmwood—waiting from hour to hour with a sinking heart—was intolerable to Regina; in a few minutes she was standing, breathless and tearful, in the porch of Dykeham farm.

Mrs. King came out, with the corner of her apron up, ready for a cry.

"Oh, miss! she be very bad, poor dear lady!—Dr. Athwood, he says he hardly thinks she will last through the night—the spasms has been awful!"

Regina leant against the porch, sick with fear; even love will not cast out that ghastly dread—the first interview with the destroying angel—the horror of a great darkness that weighs on the spirit in the presence of death.

"Ha! miss, you run so fast you're out of breath," said the good woman, wiping the cold dew from Regina's forehead; "but don't take on—there's a dear; it's what we must all come to."

Regina felt she had not come there to "take on:" she raised her head from good Mrs. King's shoulder, pressed her hand, and passed at once into Mrs. Willingham's room.

She was in bed—still beautiful, though very thin—propped up high with pillows. Since she had become worse, she had had her bed moved into her sitting-room, that she might have about

her all her favourite pursuits. Until very lately she had still painted, and there was a brilliant tropical sketch on her easel—even so late as yesterday she had enjoyed hearing Regina sing, and the piano was not closed.

It was all clear to her now—there is no self-deception when death really approaches.

"My little Regina," she said, holding out her hand with an altered look and voice, "I was longing to see you. You will tell my Alban that I was very happy; and your love will console him for my loss."

"I am come to sit with you and grandmama," said Regina, trying to be composed; "and I will say all you wish, and do all I can for Alban."

"He will feel it very much when he comes back," she went on; "but he will not shew it—he shews nothing almost of his heart; but I think he feels the more. It is bad to bleed inwardly."

"I will try to understand him as you have done," said Regina.

Mrs. Arnold, who was reading at intervals, at her friend's request, from the Bible, now began in

her silver voice to repeat the twenty-third Psalm; while the invalid lay tranquilly listening, and Regina leaned against the pillow, and tried to still her sobs, and her beating pulses, and the trembling in her limbs.

Later in the day the doctor came, and said that he was glad to find his patient so much more comfortable; and, having nothing else to say—for he knew pretty well what that sudden ease portended—took his leave, and returned to Bradford. And the two friends watched sadly but hopefully at the bedside, where she lay very calm, without suffering, and half asleep, until evening. Then she grew more wakeful, and insisted that Mrs. Arnold should not sit up any longer.

"I will have granny go to bed," she said. "I can send for her if I grow worse: but my little Regina I should like to keep, for she seems to me like a part of Alban."

At Mrs. Arnold's age it is a serious thing to lose a night's rest; and, seeing her friend so refreshed and calm, seeing her stronger too—for she had just been raised up to take a little tea—she bade her

affectionately good-night, and went to the room that was prepared for her.

The nurse was come, and was slumbering by the small fire that was kindled for the night, though the evening was warm, and the casement window set half open. Mrs. Willingham had been sorting and arranging a bundle of her son's letters, and had fallen into a doze during the occupation. Regina tied the papers together, and laid them beside her friend. While she was so occupied her thoughts wandered back to that evening, two years ago, when she had stood singing with Mrs. Willingham at the piano, and Alban played at chess with Mrs. Arnold at the table near. She remembered their panic as the blind was stirred by the mysterious hand outside—and this memory, with the mournful voice of the hoot owl in the Dingleby woods made her shiver with a sudden fear.

"Regina!"

Some one uttered her name in a tone of such mortal anguish that her heart stood still. She turned quickly to the bed; Mrs. Willingham was sleeping calmly—a sharp rustle made her look to-

wards the window—the blind was thrust aside, and a haggard face leaned in, while again the word "Regina!" came trembling like a pang from his lips.

Fear made Regina bold; she walked swiftly to the window, and said in a firm low tone, "There is a sick lady here—she is sleeping just now—and I am sure you would not wish to disturb what may be her last hours!"

"Oh God! do not abandon me! Leave me this one love, this one hatred of my life!" he cried, stretching his wasted hands into the room. "Let me in, for pity's sake; let me kneel by her side, once more—once more!"

"I do not know what to do!" cried Regina, much agitated; "indeed, I believe Mrs. Willingham is dying."

"I know it—I know every passage in her life! Open to me, for the love of Heaven! I am he whose life she has drained by inches—I am Herbert Willingham!"

"Oh! then, pray do not come in—do not agitate her last moments with regrets that now can avail nothing!" pleaded Regina.

"Regrets! Has not her whole life been one fierce atonement?" he cried. "I come to pardon! Let me in!"

"Regina, my love!" said Mrs. Willingham's feeble voice.

She was awake, and struggling to sit up.

"I was speaking to a friend who came to inquire after you," whispered Regina, leaning over her.

"Yes—I know—let him come in, and bid me farewell," she said distinctly.

Regina went in the chill and darkness along the passage, and unbarred the large hall door. The moment it swung back, he rushed in like a madman—indeed she feared he was mad—and hurried with her to the bedside of his early love.

"Oh! live—live!" he groaned, suddenly falling on his knees, as if the springs of life had given way at once.

She turned her eyes upon him, and smiled a little. Regina, standing by her pillow, wrapped in her long white shawl, was shivering with excitement and cold.

"We are at peace, Regina!" he exclaimed, stretching his clasped hands towards her—"at peace after all these stormy years; there is forgiveness between us at last."

Mrs. Willingham's eyes were half closed, her breathing slower.

"Perfect remission and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord," she whispered after a pause, her mind reverting to the last prayer she had used before she slept.

"Is there—is there *nothing* you can ask me now?" he asked, in a tone of agony.

Her hand strayed to the packet of letters, her lips seemed to frame the words, "My son!"

"*His* son! no matter—I will do him right! I had done him a great wrong. I had thought of this before—I can with your help—shall it be so?" he asked, turning round and grasping Regina's dress.

"Oh! yes, yes!" she faltered through her tears, not knowing what he meant, but wishing only to make him calmer, for the sake of her dying friend.

"Regina, do you know me? do you know who

kneels beside you?" he cried, appealing to the placid face before him. "Did you ever, *ever* shed a tear for *me* among your sorrows? Did you ever wish that fatal act undone—or think I should have loved you better than that wretch? I have yearned to ask this of you many hopeless years; and now—and now I come and ask it of your corpse!"

There was a pause—a stillness. The half-closed lids were fixed—the parted lips were breathless evermore.

"Yes! of her corpse!" the wretched man fell prostrate on the ground, and wept, not like a child—like a vexed spirit, like a stormy sea, like the rending of winds among the winter trees.

"Nurse!" cried Regina in a sharp voice, that startled her own ears.

The old woman hurried up to the bed.

"Sure enough, dear heart! she went off like a lamb," said the nurse, and leaned over to close her eyes, while Regina and Sir Herbert knelt side by side in prayer.

When Mrs. Arnold came in at daybreak, Sir

Herbert was gone, and she would have been almost inclined to ascribe the story of his appearance to the overstrained nerves of her child, but for the repeated assurances of the nurse, that a strange gentleman had come and gone "like a flash of lightning," and had seemed much more distressed even than Miss Regina.

And some days afterwards, when, at the simple funeral of Mrs. Willingham, Regina assumed the post of her absent son, and followed her to the grave, she was met at the churchyard gate by the same haggard figure, aged even since their last meeting; and they once more stood side by side, while they gazed on the quieter and narrower bed in which their friend was now laid to rest.

END OF VOL. I.

M'CORQUODALE AND CO., PRINTERS, LONDON—WORKS, NEWTON.

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